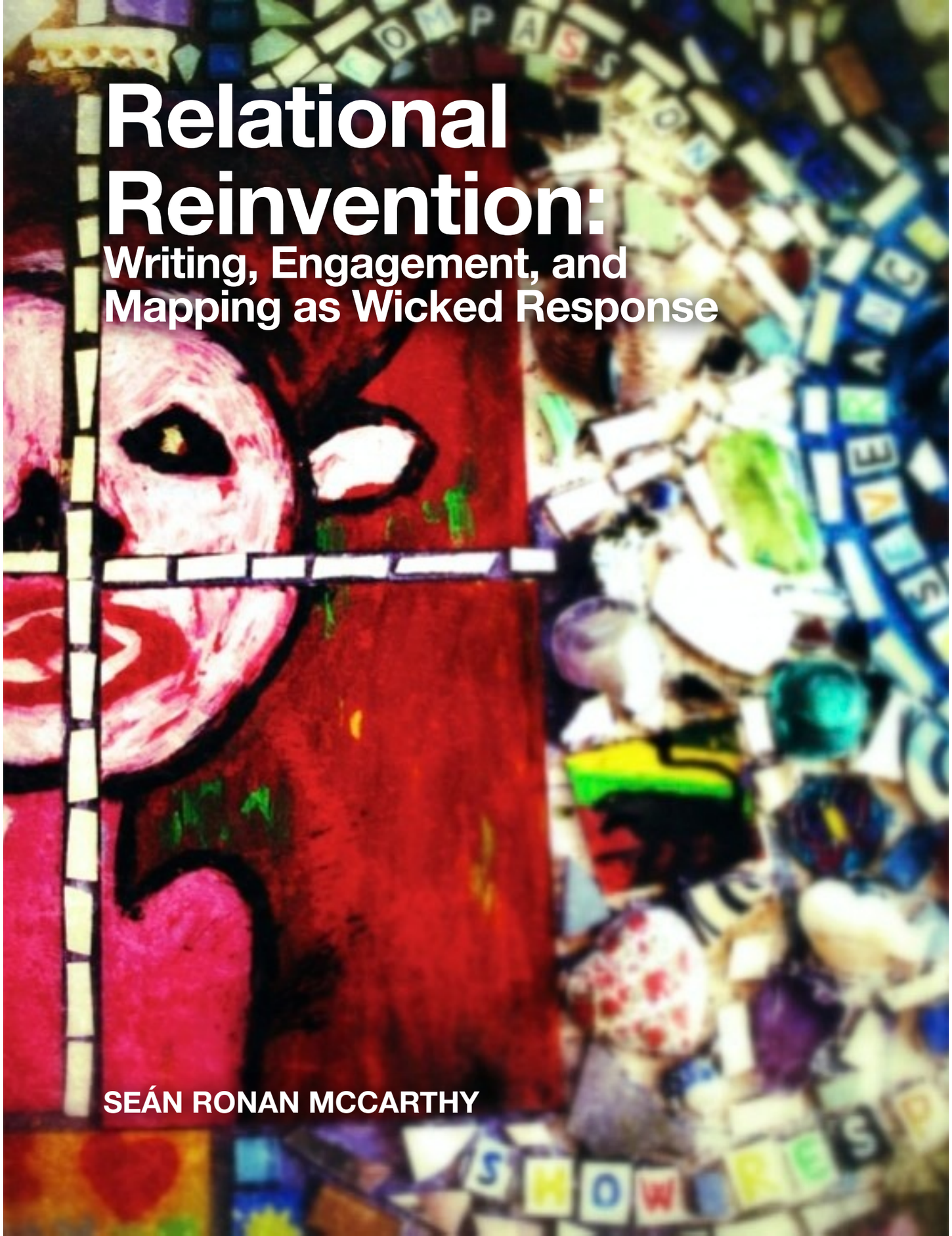
Relational
Reinvention:
Writing, Engagement, and
Mapping as Wicked Response
SEÁN RONAN MCCARTHY

Dissertation Front Matter

The Dissertation Committee for Seán Ronan McCarthy certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

RELATIONAL REINVENTION: WRITING, ENGAGEMENT, AND MAPPING AS WICKED RESPONSE

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RELATIONAL REINVENTION: WRITING, ENGAGEMENT, AND MAPPING AS WICKED RESPONSE

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my partner,

Zachary A. Dorsey:

il miglior fabbro, love of my life*.*

Acknowledgements

The small, apparently ordinary town of Mart Texas — and the somewhat quixotic civic engagement project that emerged in response to its dilemmas — have taught me an extraordinary amount about the importance and potential of relationships. I sincerely thank the good people who live, work, and learn in Mart, especially the students of Mart High and Middle schools; their inspiring and hard-working principals Ms Lou Ann Wolf and Ms Tawnya Nail; Ms Sue Davis, Janet Bridgewater, Pat Curry, Carolyn Potts, and Reverent Willie T. Hurth and his wife Sandra. I look forward to further adventures with my friends and colleagues in the Mart Community Project: Heidi Schmalbach; Anne McNamee; Lynn Osgood; Peter Hall; Professor Dorie J. Gilbert; Muhsana Ali; Amadou Kane Sy; and our new torch bearers (and my former students) Eric Rousseau, and Rebecca Reilly. Meeting Paula Gerstenblatt was perhaps the most fortuitous (and fateful!) event of my career, and I can't wait to see what creative challenges we will face together in the future.

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Relational Reinvention:

Writing, Engagement, and Mapping as Wicked Response

Seán Ronan McCarthy, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

Supervisor: Margaret A. Syverson

This multimedia dissertation, situated in Rhetoric and Composition, Digital Media Studies, and Civic Engagement, articulates a sustainable, agile approach to "wicked problems." These complex, definition-resistant, interlocking problems (such as racism or climate change) aren't ultimately solvable; rather than wicked problems being "acted upon," they can only be creatively and rigorously "responded to" by networks of committed individuals and institutions. This dissertation posits that a wicked problem necessitates a "wicked response": a sustained, emergent, and fluid strategy that focuses on changing relationships – to people, to space, and to knowledge.

In order, to make this argument, I present the case of Mart, a small, formerly prosperous town in East Texas that has been in decline over the last half of a century. Throughout this dissertation, I analyze the ongoing efforts of the Mart Community Project (MCP), a cohort of Mart residents, international artists, and students and instructors from a variety of departments at the University of Texas at Austin. Over the past two years, the MCP has engaged in over twenty-five discrete projects, all with the aim of helping the Mart Community reimagine itself in the face of its primary wicked problem: a lack of civic cohesion.

In the first chapter I explore how language fails to define or describe a wicked problem, yet is still necessary in order to transform it. I illustrate this contradiction in part through the Chambless Field mural, a successful MCP community arts project that by "writing community" became a productive response. My second chapter examines service learning and demonstrates how university/community partnerships and "participatory engagement" can be part of a nuanced approach to a wicked problem. Using the work of UT students in design-oriented and civic engagement classes, I demonstrate in the third chapter how "mapping" can be both a savvy pedagogical tool and a key element in reinventing the relationships of people to space and to one another. This dissertation offers up these diverse strategies with the sincere hope that the particulars of the MCP's wicked response might be productively generalized to aid others participating in similarly challenging civic engagement work on wicked problems.

List of Illustrations/Media

List of Illustrations/Media

Introduction:

Wicked Problems, Wicked Responses

Introduction

In this dissertation, I argue that studying, embracing, and promoting relationships between key community stakeholders and experts in institutions from beyond that community is a viable and sustainable means of engaging with complex social problems. In other words, I suggest a way of building a sustainable response to what are often referred to as “wicked problems.” Consequently, I suggest that such problems are best approached from what I describe as a “relational” vantage point. A relational methodology is premised upon the understanding that complex social problems have no unique or static core, and thus rather than being “acted upon,” they need to be “responded to” and even “written with” committed individuals and organizations from both within and outside a community.

In order to make this argument throughout the dissertation, I present the case of Mart, a small, formerly prosperous town in East Texas that, like many rural communities, has been in decline over the last half a century. Mart faces such problems as a decaying built environment, an aging population, few opportunities for the town’s youth, and unequal distribution of wealth. These problems contribute to poor civic pride and participation in city politics and culture, a lack of social cohesion that is exacerbated by historically fraught relations between the African American and white populations. How these interrelated issues affect life in Mart are not best understood by residents’ articulation of their disgruntlement, anger, or desire for change. Rather, they are felt by silence. A phrase you will often hear from Mart residents is that there is “nothing to do” in town — a brief acknowledgement of boredom which I believe disguises a deeper, abiding paralysis. This paralysis is more a feeling than an articulation, less “there’s nothing to do” than a resigned belief that there’s nothing to be done.

Mart’s woes are in fact what design theorists call wicked problems: issues that, because of their inherent complexity are difficult to define (let alone “fix”). Mart’s poor economy, failing infrastructure, and history of racial division all combine to form what is one of the town’s most pressing wicked problems: poor civic cohesion and pride. If the town doesn’t pull together, then it is going to be very difficult for the city to pull itself out of a downward spiral that has lasted over half a century. Noting how a wicked problem stands beyond standard research and problem-solving structures, I offer a brief overview here in the dissertation’s introduction of the Mart Community Project (MCP), a civic engagement entity that comprises a network of local stakeholders, students, teachers, and artists that has worked with Mart residents since 2010 to transform Mart’s problem of civic cohesion rather than attempt to solve it. On the surface, the assorted tactics used by the MCP do not appear to have the

coherence of a well-designed plan. However, one of the goals of this dissertation is to demonstrate how tackling a wicked problem can't be accomplished through conventional problem-solving. This dissertation is my attempt to design and describe a wicked response to a wicked problem.

Furthermore, a relational approach does not view the problem space as a bounded, defined entity such as a "community." Like the difficulties that beset it, the problem space is (and always has been) a tangle of relations on the move. Problem and problem space are, from a relational perspective, therefore part of the same set of expanding and contracting relations. The goal, then, becomes less about designing a terminal solution to the problem at hand than developing ongoing, varied responses to it. This is achieved by reengineering and reinventing the relationships that are both part of the problem and the key to its transformation.

Settlement in Mart began shortly after the Civil War under its former name, Willow Springs. After it was granted a post office in 1880, residents changed the name of the town to Mart, reflecting their expectations that their city would become a vibrant commercial center. Their aspirations were not misguided: by the mid 1880s, Mart had two steam grist mills and two schools. For a short time thereafter, the town boasted of having the largest cotton gin in the world, and until recently, the largest Purina feed store in the US. In 1900, the International and Great Northern Railroad completed a section of track that connected Mart to the nearby cities of Marin and Waco. The increased job opportunities saw the population in Mart jump from 300 residents in 1900 to over 2,000 in 1910. This rapid increase in population brought enough activity for three banks to set up shop in town, the creation of a local newspaper (The Mart Messenger, which runs to this day), and the development of local infrastructure such as sidewalks, paved streets, and the installation of an electricity grid.

Image 1.1 Mart in the 1920s

Image: Sean McCarthy, courtesy of the Nancy Nail Memorial Library, Mart, TX.

The after-effects of the 1929 stock crash and ensuing economic depression led to a slow decline in Mart. The railroad company stopped passenger service to the town in the 1930s, and then shut down the line completely in the 1960s. The gradual erosion of this major economic and social lifeline was devastating to the Mart Community. The one-hundred and two businesses that flanked the main thoroughfares in Mart in the 1950s had been whittled down to forty-eight in the 1970s. Today, twenty-two businesses survive, and many former bustling storefronts are either empty or used as storage space. The decline in the town's built environment mirrors a steep decline in population. From a high of 3,800 in 1929, 2010 census figures show that Mart's population now stands at little over 2,200. The declining tax base that comes with depopulation has not done Mart's infrastructure any favors. The roads off Texas Avenue are in an appalling state, some of them home to potholes so large that it is difficult to navigate the terrain without an SUV. Many of the houses that flank those streets are not in much better condition. In the years between 2000 and 2010, the number of active households dropped in Mart from 812 to 721. Many of those homes are abandoned, in serious disrepair or condemned: the 2010 census reports that 14.7 percent of all housing units in Mart are vacant. This structural blight can be seen across many neighborhoods in town, a significant contributing factor to declining property values.

Image 1.2 Mart Today

Image: Sean McCarthy

The appearance of decay is mirrored by troubling prospects for Mart's future. Projections about Mart's population spread see a sharp increase in people aged 45 and higher by 2015, which means that over the next two decades the majority of the community will be moving toward retirement. The lowest

population bracket is the 20-24 year-olds, which is typically a marker of health in small towns, as this group represents the people who are employed and are perhaps making plans to settle down in the area. Mart also faces a problem that is common among towns of its size as cash-strapped states across the country consolidate school districts. Under the stewardship of two energetic school principals, Mart High and Middle schools have moved from being deemed academically unacceptable to the eighty-eighth percentile in just three years. Unless the city council and school board fights to keep its schools, however, there is a distinct possibility that this major hub of activity in the town will disappear, and Mart's children would be forced to commute to nearby towns to continue their education.

Considering the fantastic job the teachers are doing at those schools — and taking into account that high school football culture is currently the single most important cultural practice in the town — this would be a devastating blow. It would weaken young adults' already tenuous relationship to the town (other than football, the most common opinion about Mart from the young people we have encountered is that "there's nothing to do") and increase their desire to seek opportunities elsewhere. Furthermore, loss of the schools would also mean that Mart would be even less attractive than it already is to families who are looking to relocate from the Waco hub to one of the smaller towns that surround it.

The fortunes of Mart have slipped considerably over the last few generations, but there have always been the consistent problems of race relations. With a surprisingly low Hispanic population (approximately 5.3%, most of whom have moved to Mart over the last two decades), these problems are centered largely between the African American and white populations in the town. The majority of African Americans live in what is locally known as Black Folks Town, a poor neighborhood that lies southwest of where the train tracks used to divide Mart. There is a marked difference between the upkeep of the roads and houses in this neighborhood compared to other parts of town, signaling the disparity in incomes between the black and white populations; compared to white home ownership, which runs at 75%, black ownership of homes lags behind at 53.1%. The segregated schools and football teams may have integrated decades ago, but the memory of racial conflict runs deep. Tensions exist between local law enforcement and black populations. During the Summer of 2011, for example, a petition went around town to stop police from apparently harassing black youth. In terms of leadership, the African American churches have active and progressive stewardship. Apart from church leaders, however, there is a distinct lack of African American participation in civic institutions in Mart. Until last year, there was no black representation on the city council, and there are currently no teachers of color in the school district.

Despite this litany of rather depressing social, economic and cultural statistics, Mart's outlook is not all bad. While there has been a dramatic drop in business ownership over the past decades, Mart still retains a number of car workshops, two bakeries, and a regional bank. It holds a major asset in the form of Read's foodstore. Without this longstanding family-owned business, locals would have to shop seventeen miles awy in Waco, or be forced to make do with the high-priced (and often low-quality) fast food stocks of the local convenience stores and gas stations. The steep population decline that marked the 1950s through the 1990s has evened off: the population actually rose between 1990 and 2000, from 2110 to 2252. Residency in Mart has remained reasonably stable since then. In 2010, the population was only 243 people less than it was ten years earlier. This stability suggests that people are getting jobs, either in Waco, or at the McLennan County Juvenile Facility, which opened in Mart in 2000, situated on the outskirts of Black Folks Town. Although the average annual income per household in Mart predictably falls far short of the national average ($30,336 compared to $54,442), the median income is surprisingly close to that of Waco, and is higher than smaller towns that are situated further away from this regional urban hub. This indicates that many people in Mart work in Waco and avail themselves of the higher salaries to be earned there. More importantly, the higher tax base and proximity to an urban center present Mart with an opportunity to fashion itself as competitive for state and national grants for development projects.

The key to commanding this kind of funding is, of course, a coherent plan to kick-start civic, economic, and cultural renewal. Along with maintaining decent statistical averages over the past decade, Mart has a rich cultural heritage that could foster such a plan. For example, Mart retains some of its former glory as a rural market and railway town, which can be glimpsed in some beautiful period architecture on and around its main thoroughfare, Texas Avenue. Although some buildings are falling into disrepair, there are many solid structures that could house new businesses and apartments. Careful refurbishment of these structures would contribute to Mart's potential to fashion itself as an historic Texas town. Other small cities in Texas (such as Calvert, Fredericksburg, and Lockhart) have successfully mined their heritage to promote tourism through attractions such as antique stores, galleries, and restaurants that serve traditional Texan fare, such as barbeque. In this respect, Mart has an excellent resource in the form of the Nancy Nail Memorial Library, a small rural library that houses a significant collection of cultural artifacts and historical records that reflects the area's rich historical heritage. The library could become a key institution that connects Mart's past with a possible refurbished future by providing the historical context that could drive a coherent redevelopment plan.

Of course, lacquering the town with a veneer of old world Texas charm is only one way to package a sustained and sustainable rejuvenation program. Focus on this alone may bring some tourism, revenue, and tax dollars to the town, but is not

going to necessarily fix the deeply systemic social and structural problems that exist in Mart (and it might exacerbate some of the town's tensions around racial issues). A more solid way to at least partially guarantee Mart's survival in this century is for it to become an attractive proposition for families who wish to take advantage of attractive real estate prices and the comforts of small-town living. This will require a number of complex and expensive long-term goals such as repairing and expanding its infrastructure; reversing the decay of the town's built environment; securing and improving the quality of education in its schools; and building a vibrant social and cultural fabric.

This is all possible, but only if there is increased civic cohesion and a sense of common purpose among Mart's residents. As it stands, solidarity in Mart is mired by poverty and divisions that are the product of long-standing racial tensions. Without attending to the core social problems that affect the town, the chance of developing and implementing a successful rejuvenation plan is questionable. The problem is where to start. People have a good sense of what they need: better services; increased opportunities for their children; an increase in civic pride; something — anything — to do in town. But they have no idea about how to go about making these possibilities a reality. The older generations reminisce about the golden days of their youth, when you couldn't ride a bike down Texas Avenue on a Saturday because of the crowds in town for market day, or the time they spent running between the town's two cinemas to catch two double-features in a single day. The younger generations tend to look at you blankly when they are asked about what they like about Mart. All they have ever known is a town struggling to survive. They don't realize, or care, about Mart's past, nor do they have any idea about what a more spirited, welcoming town might look like. All of this might seem like apathy, a shrug of resignation in the face of an unalterable reality. A more practical mode of looking at it, however, is to view this as a kind of systemic confusion or paralysis, which are understandable reactions to an overwhelming problem that appears too complex, slippery, and fragmentary to engage with in any meaningful way.

But the Mart Community Project certainly tries. The MCP comprises a cohort of Mart residents, international artists, and students and scholars from a variety of disciplines at the University of Texas at Austin and Baylor University in Waco. It is supported by the financial backing and expertise of local, state, and national levels, and in its twenty-two month existence, has initiated twenty five projects that have involved the participation of over three hundred people. In its own idiosyncratic and emergent fashion, the MCP has attempted to respond to wickedness not by taming it through discrete projects, but by embracing its complexity by submerging itself in wickedness's lifeblood: relationships. Those many initiatives that the MCP built certainly had specific goals (the creation of a mural, for instance), but these goals were fundamentally about bringing people together with a common purpose. And it is from that common

purpose, I believe (and the MCP practices), that a community may build a renewed sense of solidarity that may sustain the ongoing, transformative work required to turn Mart's fortunes around.

As the project grew, this relational focus became as much a method as a philosophical and theoretical grounding. Increasing numbers of UT students became part of the project because the entry requirements were attractive and practical: we did not demand that students become part of a particular project that had already defined goals. Instead, we suggested they combine their interests with that of the MCP as best they could, and to see what happened.

Stating that relationship building is key to structural and social change in communities is hardly revolutionary. But as we shall see, premising an entire methodology around relationship building — as opposed to the design and implementation of discrete projects — presents scholars and civic engagement specialists with a number of definite challenges. First, unlike the design of an identifiable product (building a school, for example, or fixing a water system), fostering relationships is difficult to plan, implement, and analyze. This is because it is impossible to guarantee how a relationship will unfold: the most we can hope for is to guide relationships in the right direction. The fundamental instability of relationship building means that it is impossible to present a concrete idea of what the final outcome a project premised on relationship building will be, precisely because it is impossible to predict how relationships are going to turn out. Furthermore, there is no "stopping point" to relationship building in social issues. As the term implies, relationships are the fundamental building blocks of solidarity and community. If relationships cease to exist, then it follows that the social structure that binds a community will evaporate. Engagement with a social problem is consequently an iterative process that must continually renew itself, well after the researchers and "experts" have exited the stage. This means that the community must find ways of sustaining growth and responsivity to the problems they need to tackle. Doing so can be difficult because projects premised on relationship building may foreclose the possibility of ever accurately predicting what a final outcome will be.

Maureen Rogers, a Research Fellow with the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities at La Trobe University in Australia, agrees that the problems that face a small town like Mart are not easily remedied. She notes in her essay, "Social Sustainability and the Art of Engagement — The Small Towns: Big Picture Experience," that "Changing agricultural models, and the lack of infrastructure to adequately support large businesses leave formerly prosperous rural communities in danger of extinction (Rogers 110). Short term government intervention or capital injection (building a new community center, for example, or fixing the roads) will not reverse their fate. Rogers explains:

Communities attempting to create a sustainable future need firstly to focus on rebuilding their community cohesion—to foster highly motivated, creative responses from a community empowered to effectively respond … [The] recent preoccupation with fixing society by solely economic means has dampened our ability to deal forcefully and imaginatively with social, cultural, and environmental issues—and yet the economic viability and environmental sustainability of these small rural communities will largely depend on their ability to rekindle creative energies—to design imaginative solutions, turning around the social pathologies of apathy and frustration which often afflict them. (110)

Rogers' diagnosis resists an easy explanation and therefore an identifiable solution. Changing cultural and economic modes of production have overwritten rural towns' historical function. Their decline of rural life is not something you can throw money at, and the problem is too systemic to be reversed by a quick fix.

Again, Mart is faced with "a wicked problem," a term that comes from the design disciplines to help identify complex relationships that inform the design process. To understand a term wicked problem and to illustrate its properties, I present here a look at a relatively simple object: a computer mouse. Of the many choices a designer must make, she must think about the shape that will most comfortably mold itself to hands of different sizes; the quality and cost of the casing materials, whether it will connect to the computer wirelessly or with a cable. These choices depend on a multitude of factors such as the quality, durability, availability and cost of materials, the consumer trends, and the proliferating number of devices to which the mouse could could connect (or make the device obsolete, such as the tablet you are holding). The designer is thus faced with a tangle of questions that require many types of specialized knowledge on a variety of scales, none of which are stable or can be isolated from each other.

Horst Rittel, a design theorist who taught at the University of California at Berkeley, coined "wicked problem" in the 1960s to describe the complexities in every design choice. The term entered written academic discourse in a short paper by philosopher and systems scientist C. West Churchman in 1967, in which he theorizes wicked problems as "a class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing" (Churchman 141-2). Since the 1970s, the term wicked problem has become popular in a variety of scholarly disciplines such as political science, natural resource management, urban and regional planning, and cybernetics research (Head and Alford 5), as a way to contemporary a variety of complex policy, management, and sustainability problems.

The term's efficacy largely derives from a set of characteristics of a wicked problem that Rittel (and co-author Melvin M. Webber) finally laid out in a 1972 article called "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning." In that article they propose that a wicked problem resists definition because of its complexity, and is only partially understood through attempting a solution that itself will alter the properties of the problem. Rittel and Webber stress that they are not using the term "wicked" because it is ethically deplorable; rather, they employ the term to show it how the problem is slippery, and highly resistant to any particular kind of problem solving.

These points are often reformulated by scholars depending on the context of the problem and disciplinary perspective. A useful way to think about a wicked problem is through its opposite, what Rittel and Webber call a "a tame problem" (160). A tame problem is one that has a clear statement of the issue, a definite stopping point, and a solution that can be objectively evaluated. A tame problem is in many ways similar to a prompt for a typical introductory writing course assignment. Instructors ask students to pick an issue to write about, ask them to research that issue, and ask them to write about it using evidence and analysis within a defined page limit. Of course, the topic could itself be complex, such as poverty, but the structure of the assignment is inherently tame in that it has a clearly defined structure, goal, and a means of evaluation.

Because problem and solution are structurally inseparable in wicked problems, scholars inevitably have difficulty explaining how to logically approach them. Jeff Conklin, a hypertext and collaborative technology scholar, believes that a solution can be found to a wicked problem, but gesturing to its complex structure that solution has to be a social process (Conklin 15). Political scientist Keith Grint takes issue with the idea of a solution because of its inseparability from the problem itself, yet his proposal is to adopt a bricoleur's tactical use of multiple skills to develop a "clumsy solution" that solves the problem but in a messy way. I gesture to these limited examples not to find fault with them, but to illustrate the difficulty in analyzing a wicked problem outside of normative structures of logic.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I present my own definition of interacting with a wicked problem that moves beyond the problem/solution mechanism. This theory builds on the theories of Rittel and others, and is informed by my direct observation in Mart. My purpose for doing so is to provide a way to understand and relate to complex problems (such as civic cohesion) —particularly for scholars in rhetoric and composition and beyond who participate in civic engagement research.

First, a wicked problem resists language; it is messy and indescribable, and any language we use must always be seen as a form of placeholder. This has implications for the kinds of problems we choose to engage in civic engagement partnerships.

Second, a wicked problem is never really singular, as it is always informed by systems of other problems. Civic cohesion in Mart, for example, is influenced by a range of other wicked problems such as race relations, economic inequality, and changing agricultural practices. Finally, a wicked problem is iterative, so the idea of "fixing" one should be abandoned. The MCP may certainly have a stopping point, but the problem of civic cohesion will be an ongoing issue that we will never finally repair.

Instead of trying to solve problems, what we can do is respond. The MCP's response to Mart's wicked problem of civic cohesion is to throw as many ideas at it as we can and build on what emerges. In this sense, the project takes on the properties of the problem itself. Our response is not neatly planned, nor does it subscribe to particular methodologies. The goal of those projects is not to solve anything in particular; rather these projects promote the further production of relationships between people, space, and ideas. And the response is resistant to language. Of course, we cannot avoid using language, but throughout the rest of the dissertation I suggest that language's relation to a wicked problem is at best ambiguous and often problematic.

The above is what I call a "wicked response" to a complex social problem. Admittedly, my definitions are vague and require much more careful consideration, but a more thorough exploration is beyond the scope of this introduction. Sociologist Valerie Brown notes in "Collective Inquiry and its Wicked Problems" that "the original writers on wicked problems emphasize that this type of problem does not exist only in the head, it exists on the ground, and it cannot be generalized outside its context" (Brown, Harris, and Russell, 63). A wicked response demands to be situated in the context of its problem — an issue that this dissertation grapples with in both its form and method. By choosing a wicked response as my object of inquiry, a host of methodological issues come into focus. For example, a wicked problem escapes language, yet I must use language to describe it. A response takes on the properties of the problem itself, rendering a method difficult if not impossible to decide in advance. As there is no solution, I face the question of what generalizable knowledge I can possibly offer my readers, and what I can offer to rhetoric and composition, my chosen field of study.

The following dissertation attempts to wrestle with these contradictions in its unusual structure and form of presentation. It certainly doesn't attempt to succeed in accurately presenting a wicked response — rather, it performatively exposes the contradiction in trying to describe an emergent phenomenon. This contradiction is embedded into the dissertation's title: "Relational Reinvention" is a contradiction in terms. Rather than being a thing in itself, a wicked problem is made up of systems of relations. Consequently, there is no definable essence from which to reinvent. In practically every aspect of my work, however, I find it

impossible to avoid the specter of essence. Throughout the following chapters, I constantly grapple with the terms such as "individual" and "community," and find language constantly failing me in my enterprise. How I generalize the MCP's work often feels far too close to solutions, and thus I betray my object of analysis. Failure, I concede, is woven into the very fabric of what follows.

Appropriately, failure is a theme of the first chapter, "Writing Community." There, I explore the emergence of the MCP during the summer of 2010, exploring how MCP researchers first experienced the challenges of the wicked problem it chose to engage. I recount the project's history, and suggest how MCP researchers failure to either fully articulate its mission or diagnose the resistance that it encountered from Mart residents reveals language's ambiguous relation to a wicked problem. Diane Davis' excavation of how communication occurs prior to and in excess of language offers generative possibilities for situating the potential of writing (broadly conceived) as a wicked response. To illustrate, I present a reading of a mural mosaic in an abandoned space in Mart through a relational understanding of communication that can facilitate "writing community."

In chapter two, I model civic cohesion from the perspective of civic partnerships in higher education. By exploring the tangled history of university/ "community" partnerships, I suggest that civic cohesion resists institutionalization in the traditional sense. In other words, educational institutions suffer the same wicked problem of civic cohesion that they attempt to solve beyond the campus gates. By modeling the MCP's experiments in civic engagement through online "participatory cultures," I propose a model of what I call "participatory engagement" through which a wicked response can be effectively anchored within institutional structures.

In "Mapping the Problem as Wicked Response," the dissertation's final chapter, I turn to media projects developed by MCP-affiliated classes to model how students can use media to contribute to a wicked response. I explore how media is incorporated into civic engagement projects in rhetoric and composition, and explain how a relational theory of space can open up possibilities for mapping as a means of writing about and with off-campus partners. To do so, I use mapping methods proposed by landscape architect James Corner to explain how various student assignments both reveal and produce the complex relations that structure space and relationships in Mart.

My conclusion explores exactly what its title promises: "If You Don't Feel Stupid, You're Probably Doing It Wrong." I end this dissertation by examining why it has been so agonizingly hard — why I've felt stupid throughout my work on this project, and how it has so vexed me to the core on both a professional and personal level. I arrive at the notion that this feeling of stupidity is in fact a good thing, and I argue that civic engagement really ought to leave us so undone. Following one of the many projects

that Mart students engaged in with the MCP, one student shared that our work helped him realize that his town was in fact “a pretty cool place to be after all.” Oddly enough, I offer as benediction that the state of feeling stupid can also be “a pretty cool place to be,” and that stupidity can be productively harnessed and channelled toward civic engagement’s wicked response.

Chapter 1

Writing Community as Wicked Response

Section 1

Introduction

On Saturday, July 17, 2011, I participated in the construction of a mosaic mural on a concession stand on a disused football field in Mart, Texas. By midday, it was already one hundred degrees, and the temperature would climb to one hundred and nine by late afternoon. Despite the obscene heat during the hottest summer in living memory, a small group of people cheerfully sweated and guzzled lukewarm water as they arranged chipped glass and found objects onto the east facing wall of this derelict building. Working slowly but steadily, they would remain at this task for a number of days, transforming the wall into a work of art while puzzling passersby. Included in this merry band were two Senegal-based artists of international reputation and their three children; the pastor of the African American Baptist church down the road; a white mother and daughter proudly wearing anti-abortion slogans on their t-shirts; and a Latino carpenter who drove the one hundred and eighteen miles from Austin to erect an awning for the concession stand (free of charge). The cast of characters was completed by the presence of three University of Texas at Austin graduate students (two American, one Irish) from disparate disciplines. Even as I helped to construct the mural under the hot sun, I had no coherent idea what the ultimate aim of making such an artwork could be. In retrospect, I now recognize that our work on the Chambless Field mural (and other related community arts projects) was a fundamentally rhetorical response to Mart's complex social problems. The design of the mural project was at various times chaotic, savvy, foolish, random, and even inspired, but I have faith that the story of how the Chambless Field mural came to be has much to offer those planning similar community arts projects or to anyone invested in the intersections of rhetoric and civic engagement.

Section 2

(Re)Building Memory and “the Art in Mart”

In 2008, Paula Gerstenblatt and members of the Davis family from Mart created an art installation on a plot of family land on North Falls Street in Mart, on the site of the original Davis family home before it burned down in the 1960s. Paula Gerstenblatt is related to the Davis’ through her marriage to Tommy Davis, with whom she has two children. From listening to her husband Tommy’s memories of growing up during the era of segregation, and as a mother of two biracial children, she was interested in investigating how community arts practices could be used to explore and present perspectives on African American history.

Image 2.1 The Art installation on North Falls Street.

Image: Paula Gerstenblatt

In July, 2009 the family held a reunion on the transformed plot that was attended by members from all over the country, and it garnered the attention of the local weekly newspaper, the *The Mart Messenger*. That project’s success generated interest among several Mart residents in local history. Paula formed a project called “(Re)Building Memory” and applied for a Texas Humanities grant to provide funds for training in local history and methods. Under the guidance of Professor Stephen Sloan, the director of the Oral History Institute at Baylor University, five Mart residents were trained in local history collection and oral history techniques, which resulted in two cabinets dedicated to African

Image 2.2 Paula Gerstenblatt

Image: Jonathan Gerstenblatt

American history in the Nancy Nail Library in Mart. A formal unveiling of these cabinets took place in June 2009, attended by thirty seven Mart residents, and documented by The Mart Messenger and The Waco Tribune.

The growing scope of the "(Re)Building Memory" project prompted Paula to apply to graduate school to continue her studies into representations of African American culture and history. She was accepted into the School of Social Work at UT Austin (UT), and began her studies in the Fall of 2009. During that semester, Paula undertook a study of the "(Re)Building Memory" project. Using interviews, photographs, and written descriptions of the project in the local media, Paula explored how the art installation on the Davis family plot confirmed the success of community arts in transforming understanding of personal identity, local history, and the role that artistic expression can play in invigorating civic participation and cohesion (Gerstenblatt, unpublished).

Gallery 2.1 Images from the history exhibit in the Nancy Nail Library, Mart TX.

Image Credit: Sean McCarthy, with special thanks to the Nancy Nail Memorial Library, Mart, TX.

Community arts is the broad term that describes a range of art-based practices that promote social and environmental justice, health, human rights and cross-cultural understandings. As community arts scholar Keith Knight explains, community arts comprise

> *any form or work of art that emerges from a community and consciously seeks to increase the social, economic, and political power of that community, and a language of cultural codes and behaviors to help human beings develop their creativity both individually and collectively. (xvi)*

Community-arts based practices are not genre or medium-specific; they include a wide variety of forms such as painting, mural making, oral history collection, creative writing, art installation, performance, and multimedia production.

Community arts approaches have become increasingly important means to promote civic pride, solidarity, and infrastructure in struggling communities (Borrup xiv). In Philadelphia, for example, artist Lily Yeh worked with community members since 1989 to create a garden in an abandoned lot that has evolved into the Village of Arts and Humanities. That project has transformed more than 250 abandoned lots and structures into 24 parks, gardens

and green spaces, and the building of a nursery, crafts studio, and six new houses. Closer to Mart, “The Better Block Project” in Dallas, TX, is a recent, exciting project initiated by Jason Roberts, a resident of the suburb of Oak Cliff. By combining community arts, impromptu street parties, and the clever and cheap redesign of busy public spaces in the neighborhood’s public thoroughfares, Roberts has transformed this formerly drab, lower-income section of Dallas into a thriving community hub. Since its

Movie 2.1 Trailer for a documentary about the Better Block Project

Movie credit: costin/boccieri media arts

inception in 2010, the project’s methods have resulted in a national movement of sorts, and its methods have been adopted by over twenty cities across the country. Roberts has become a celebrity among designers, urban planners, and community activists nationally, and he has recently announced that he is running for Congress on the strength of his work in Oak Cliff.

Although many of the outstanding community arts successes have occurred in urban areas, rural communities have also employed community arts with significant results. For example, the success of The Pie Lab — a cafe, design studio and community clubhouse in Greensboro, Alabama — earned it a feature-length article in the New York Times.[1] Because the proven success of the community arts in rural locations was confirmed in her study of the “(Re)Building Memory” project in Mart in 2009, Paula applied for Dulaney Foundation funding to expand the scope of the project to build civic cohesion and pride in Mart Community Project in 2010. The award was granted, but the early experiences of the MCP revealed that building civic cohesion was not an easy a task as it looked.

In July, 2010 Paula went about securing a spaces for public art projects. During this time, another artist, who I shall call Patricia, came on board to help out. A talented artist who taught in various schools around the area and worked in an art gallery in a nearby town, Patricia was excited about the MCP’s plan to regenerate civic pride through community arts. Having grown up in a similar-sized town close to Mart, Patricia was intimately aware of the difficulties that face rural communities, and was

excited about the possibility of creatively approaching those problems using arts-based practices.

Image 2.3 Paula Gerstenblatt and "Patricia" surveying one of Mart's closed up storefronts.

Image: Sean McCarthy

Paula and Patricia drew up plans for public art projects around town, networked with local property owners to secure a space, and created promotional materials to spread word about the project. Securing a building from which the MCP could operate was crucial to the success of the MCP's community arts focus. Following the success of the "(Re)Building Memory" project discussed in the introduction, the MCP intended to encourage Mart residents to transform their understanding of space and solidarity through creative activities such as arts projects. At the time, there was no space in town that was freely available to accomplish this task. Other than church and the football field, there is no other space where people can freely gather for social events (Mart has a community center, but it collects rent for activities in order to cover its costs). Securing one of Mart's abandoned buildings was appropriate therefore both for philosophical and practical reasons. By participating in projects that transformed an otherwise abandoned space, Mart residents could begin to think about possibilities for the town's transformation on a broader level. A building was also necessary for a very practical reason: the soaring July temperatures, which regularly hit one hundred degrees by mid afternoon, foreclosed the possibility of working outside for extended periods of time.

Securing a building turned out to be immensely difficult, and reflected the problems of race, class, and uneven economic distribution that structure Mart's poor civic cohesion. As Paula and Patricia sought out the owners of the closed-down storefronts, they discovered that these properties were all owned by a handful of people — wealthy Mart residents who had bought up much of the property on Texas Avenue in the difficult years after the railway ceased operations in Mart in 1967. None of them were willing to rent to the MCP for a variety of reasons. First, opening up the storefronts on Texas Avenue for a nonprofit venture certainly wasn't an appealing business proposition. A

local real estate agent informed Paula and Patricia that keeping the buildings vacant stabilized their value and therefore kept down the taxes that had to be paid on them. Opening a storefront for little or no rent to become a base for a public arts project and the vague possibility of new business opportunities didn't make business sense, and could actually lead to unnecessary insurance costs and building repairs.

Those practical difficulties folded into a second, related problem — poor public perception of the MCP itself. The stated aim in our grant application to the Dulaney Foundation was to kickstart civic, cultural, and economic renewal in Mart through education and public art initiatives. I had started the education aspect of the project already through the digital media camp, but because it was sequestered away in the high school for most of the three weeks of its duration, that project didn't give the MCP much status during the summer of 2010. With no visible successes to point to, Paula and Patricia were consequently left with the tough sell of convincing wealthy property owners that public art could revitalize Mart. No matter how sensitive the rhetoric, the very proposition implied that the town was in decline. To financially comfortable members of the business class, hearing this from outsiders was a tough sell, no matter how delicately it was handled.

That those outsiders were artists and academics who had claimed significant and precious funds from the Dulaney Foundation presents a third problem. The Dulaney Foundation's stated mission is to support cultural, social, and educational projects. However, Mart's poor tax base has resulted in the diversion of significant portions of the endowment's annual allocation to infrastructure projects that the city would otherwise not be able to afford. The 2008 global stock market crash hit the endowment heavily, and the Dulaney committee has to cut its annual allocation accordingly. This combination of economic and historical factors have resulted in the Dulaney Foundation regularly receiving more appeals for funding than it can handle. In 2010, The MCP was awarded $22,000, a noteworthy amount of money by any standards, but to a cash-strapped town it represents a significantly large sum. Several projects were rejected by the Dulaney Foundation that year, including one submitted by a city council member and prominent business owner to create a car park at Mart's community center. The foundation's decision to fund a community project designed by outsiders over a local application that also had a civic focus understandably made the MCP an object of close scrutiny among town residents.

The MCP's inability to generate a core identity or appreciable community buy-in brought a fourth, crucial problem into play. The project's stated aims were to use community arts to build solidarity and cultural renewal for the entire town of Mart, but the tangible evidence for that methodology's success was the "(Re)Building Memory" experiment, which, through the Davis

installation and the exhibit in the Nancy Nail Memorial Library, explicitly focused on the erasure of race from publicly endorsed narratives of Mart's history. Paula's stewardship of both projects and her relationship by marriage to the Davis family, meant that the MCP's identity was still tethered to race.

The links to race were confirmed by participation in early MCP events. As we have seen, African American students formed the majority of the group who participated in the digital media summer camp. Similarly, participation in the MCP's early arts activities, which were called "Art in Mart," were largely endorsed by the African American community. Because Paula and Patricia couldn't secure a building, they resorted to building a day of art-based workshops in early August on Texas Avenue called "Art in Mart." The activities that day occurred in two locations. Paula and a colleague of mine, Jean Cannon, hosted a jewelry and hat-making workshop outside Reid's Foodstore. Further down the street, Patricia hosted a mural painting project in the outdoor seating area of the "Dairy Cream" restaurant — a burger stand on the eastern side of Texas Avenue, about two hundred yards away from the Dairy Queen. The "Art in Mart" events drew poor participation, and those who did get involved were members of the Davis family who were involved in the art installation on the North Falls Street plot of land.

From a practical point of view, the project's slow start and the racial make-up of its participants are understandable. Because we secured Dulaney funding so late in the Spring, we did not have time to create advance publicity for the project, so very few people knew of the project's existence. Its early endorsement by the African American community is also straightforward in that they had been involved in Mart's most recent community arts experiment. However, both these factors appeared to be feeding into broader problems of how the project was perceived. As the member of the MCP with the most local knowledge and contacts, Paula began to hear from concerned supporters that the project was being criticized by influential town stakeholders such as city council members and prominent business owners as a waste of Dulaney money. It was impossible to divorce race from this critique; on one occasion, Paula was gently advised by one of the MCP's most passionate advocates on the Dulaney Foundation committee to "remember the white folks." Matters came to a head in late August when Paula had a conversation with a key business owner and city council member, who openly accused the MCP of squandering Dulaney funds on a project that was clearly focused on the African American community.

Patricia, our local collaborating artist, became increasingly nervous about the direction of the project. From the criticisms reported back to us, it was impossible to separate the practical difficulties the project was having from the combined forces of race, capital, and class that seemed to swirl around our efforts like electricity. Even though the Dairy Cream mural was still in the

process, Patricia abruptly abandoned it and the MCP entirely in late August. Despite numerous attempts to contact her, neither Paula nor I ever heard from her again, and to this day we do not have her account of why she disappeared.

Within a month of its existence, the MCP appeared to be less of a coherent response to Mart's poor civic pride and racial tensions than a bundle of contradictions that seemed to aggravate those very problems. The MCP had been awarded a significant amount of money from a locally-managed endowment to generate solidarity and civic pride but the very absence of solidarity foreclosed the possibility of the project gaining a foothold in the town. That funding was awarded partly because of the success of the "(Re)Building Memory" project, yet Mart's history of racism that project exposed appeared to saturate the MCP's identity and prevent it from gaining a foothold among Mart's wider population. These contradictions were exacerbated by the timeline of events. Because funds for the project came in so close to the summer, we didn't have the time to find a space, build capacity, or carefully think through our plans and projects. Because of the confluence of these factors, the MCP's community arts initiatives was simultaneously embraced and ignored. The project's members were both warmly welcomed and yet coolly refused entry, left outside to endure the hot Texan sun amid the clamor of critique and rumors that bounced off the walls and locked doors of Texas Avenue's abandoned buildings.

Section 3

Wickedness, Language, Exposure

A logical explanation of events fails describe what it felt like to be amid all those rumors, coded silences, and refusals. Hurt and distressed by the turn of events, Paula turned to art to try to make sense of her feelings. She combined snippets of text, poems she wrote at the time, newspaper clippings, and photographs of her childhood, family, and buildings of Mart on large canvases. Blocks of color unite these objects, sometimes even partially covering them.

Gallery 2.2 Paula Gerstenblatt's collage portraits

Image: Paula Gerstenblatt

The combination of artifacts from Paula's past, photographs of her family and buildings in Mart, and the poems that she wrote in response to the events in Mart that summer give a sense of how her experience reverberates across time and space. The placement of the objects on a canvas filled with blocks of color suggest how the events and feelings those objects represent are connected yet cannot be reduced into a linear, logical narrative.

In his famous essay, "Structures of Feeling" (1977), cultural theorist Raymond Williams explores why the experience of events evades comprehensive explanation. He argues that "practical consciousness," how we interpret the experience of life in real-time, is obfuscated if interpreted solely through the "fixed forms" of representations of ideological or social structures. As he explains:

> *… [P]ractical consciousness is always more than a handling of fixed forms and units. There is frequent*

> *tension between the received interpretation and practical experience. Where this tension can be made direct and explicit, or where some alternative interpretation is available, we are still within a dimension of relatively fixed forms. But the tension is often an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency: the moment of conscious comparison yet to come, often not even coming … And even where form and response can be found to agree without apparent difficulty, there can be qualifications, reservations, indications elsewhere: what the agreement seemed to settle but still sounding elsewhere. (130)*

The experience of an event results in a surplus of meaning that does not make itself available to cognitive scrutiny. Conscious appreciation is delayed, perhaps never to arrive. Williams defines this gap as a structure of feeling, "which can be defined as social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available" (131).

The account I provide above of the MCP's rocky start in August 2010 goes some distance to explaining the chain of events and the reasons why they were not successful. Following William's explanation of a structure of feeling, I suggest, however, that the account fails because it precipitates those events into a narrative that relies on a chronological cause and effect structure that silences how these events were experienced. Paula's collage portraits, in contrast, are an attempt to render "in solution" (rather than a solution to) the experience of those difficult weeks. The portraits reveal not only how those events resist narrative interpretation, but also how her experience of those events resist chronology. The collage method enables her express how other spaces and times — her childhood, and her life in California with her family, for example — contributed to the structure of feeling that she experienced in Mart that summer.

Paula's response speaks to how those events resist easy explanation; they are both informed by a surplus of information that is in some form apprehensible but not completely comprehensible. In what follows, I frame the feelings of stupidity, hurt, and anger those responses reveal as an experience of the wicked problem of civic cohesion in solution. This analysis reveals that complex problems are iterative and evade definition. They can only be revealed by a response that never really solves the problem, but rather shifts the relations that structure it. Using the work of Diane Davis, I explore how communications happen prior to the language relation, therefore reorienting what we mean by solidarity and community. Aligning Davis' approach to communication with Rittel's theorization of a wicked problem, I suggest, presents a rhetorically effective means of responding to complex civic problems.

A wicked problem, as Valerie Brown, John Harris, and Jacqueline Russell remind us, is

> *a complex issue that defies complete definition, for which there can be no final solution, since any resolution generates further issues, and here solutions are not true or false or good or bad, but the best that can be done at the time. Such problems are not morally wicked, but diabolical in that they resist all usual attempts to resolve them. (Brown et al 4)*

Its value as a concept, as I have suggested in the introduction, is that it favors a relational understanding of complex phenomena. That is, it frames social phenomena as clusters of relations rather than the interaction of elements that have their own discrete essences (Emirbayer 280). A relational understanding helps us to forge an appreciation of wicked problems without having to reduce them to simpler formulations. However, as the following brief read of the MCP as an instance and response to a wicked problem reveals, relational dynamics of a wicked problem also makes it difficult if not impossible to interpret in terms of standard approaches to causality and agency.

Mart's wicked problem of civic cohesion is the result of complex fluid relations between Mart's residents and their lived environment. These relations operate on multiple scales: global issues (changes in transportation and agricultural practices, the population shift from rural to urban); national legacies (the particular circumstances of race relations in the US, for example); and local particularities (the state of the lived environment, the lived experience of class and race, climate and so on). From that brief list, it is already apparent that none of these scales exist in isolation to each other and they move across space and time. Historical legacies are etched into cultural patterns that inform everyday experience, just as global issues (such as the world economy) have material impact on Mart residents' quality of life. Each broad category that I address shapes and is shaped by the others in myriad, shifting combinations and patterns that from a relational standpoint are not bounded by specific coordinates of time and space.

The MCP didn't explicitly start out with a wicked response in mind; the problem we were faced with forced it upon us. Our responses served to foreground the very problem itself, and we learned from those experiences to build better projects from them, such as the North Pearl St. and Chambless Field murals that form the final case study of this chapter.

My representational choices in the above account of those difficult weeks during the summer of 2010 attempt to give a sense of how the myriad relations that structure a wicked problem make it difficult to locate agency. From a relational standpoint, the "individual" has no essence as such, and is a cluster of relations. Consequently, a wicked response methodology focuses on effects produced by the intersection of relations rather than assigning agency to objects (such as a person, community, or institution). The complex emotions that

Paula's collage portraits reflect illustrate how agency and causality escape legibility either through observation or by our efforts to represent it. It often arrives subliminally, as negative feelings of inadequacy or stupidity, or as a surplus of information that is is well characterized by Williams' explanation of a structure of feeling.

In *Inessential Solidarity* (2010), rhetorician Diane Davis offers a rhetorical perspective how to think about a wicked problem from the perspective of communication. Davis argues that for any symbolic communication to occur (speech, writing, images, and so on), a prior responsiveness or persuadability already be in place. "For there to be any sharing of symbolic meaning," she writes,

> *any construction of a common enemy or a collective goal, any effective use of persuasive discourse at all, a more originary rhetoricity must already be operating, a constitutive persuadability and responsively [responsivity?] that testifies, first of all, to a fundamental structure of exposure. If rhetorical practices work by managing to have an effect on others, then an always prior openness to the other's affection is its first requirement: the "art" of rhetoric can be effective only among affectable existents, who are by definition something other than distinct individuals or self-determining agents, and whose relations necessarily precede and exceed symbolic intervention. (3)*

This "structure of exposure" is a form of communication that is outside of symbolic discourse and it has no discernible content. If I choose to ignore someone who approaches me, that refusal of communication is itself a response, a communication act. My choice, in other words, is preceded by a response that I did not choose. I am open to the experience of the other before I can make sense or give an account of it. The other does not approach me as a neatly packaged explanation. Rather, the other is communicated through exposure that happens prior to symbolic discourse at all. As such, that exposure can also never be fully accounted for in language after the event. It necessarily precedes and exceeds my ability to communicate it.

The exposure that precedes symbolic communication exposes the impossibility of the self-determining agent or individual. There can be no "I" in exposure; the communication event has happened to "me" before a legible self can respond. The "I" that is expressed in symbolic communication is preceded by a "we" through the structure of exposure that precedes it. Davis argues that this "we" is a "being-with" that incapsulated in Jean Luc Nancy's idea of "being-in-common:" an experience of finite being through the infinity of its shared, innumerable, and unnamable relations (Davis 7).

"Being-in-common" fundamentally recasts received ideas of community. As rhetorican Alex Reid notes,"the conventional notion of community suggests a sharing of interiorized

characteristics: a particular religious faith, an ideological viewpoint etc." (Reid 2010). Nancy, however, questions the very idea of an explicitly shared commonality:

> *That is for me the core of the question of community; community doesn't have a common being, a common substance, but consists in being–in–common, from the starting point it's a sharing, but sharing what? Sharing nothing, sharing the space between." (Nancy et al.)*

Before there can be persons, institutions, and affiliation, the "common being" that we typically ascribe to community, there exists a sharing that is a contentless "being-in-common." To avoid "being-in-common," according to Nancy, is "the closure of the political" (qtd. in Davis 7). That is, to interpret community as a work or a project, to fix it in symbolic discourse, is to shut down the exposedness of the "being-with" that precedes and exceeds it.

Davis argues that our task is to expose a community without essence,

> *to renew it and communicate it but without turning it into a "work," without essentializing or substantializing it. The task given to "us," in the name of solidarity, is to expose exposedness, "to expose the unexposable in." This exposition takes place in writing and through writing — broadly speaking, "writing" as any performance of the inscription,aural, visual, and so on — a sharing that testifies to the shattering limit by touching it. (8)*

Solidarity, then, is the very work of communicating community's fundamental lack of essence. Community cannot be defined or stabilized in language because it is a contentless sharing. Rather, it is writing's never-ending task to make apprehensible that which is incomprehensible, a touching of the "the shattering limit."

Despite their very different approaches and formulation of the problem, there are distinct structural resonances between Rittel's formulation of a wicked problem and Davis's theory of communication and writing. A wicked problem and communication both respond to relational forces that will not be fully mapped onto language. Any attempts at a solution to a wicked problem, like Davis' explanation of writing, cannot solve or tame the problem; rather, they are iterative, never-ending imperatives. I suggest that rather than being structural parallels, however, Davis and Rittel's approaches map relational complexity at different levels of scale: Rittel's theory of relationality hovers at the structural level of a complex problem, whereas Davis' zeroes in on the wickedness that structures any communication. Aligning Davis's and Rittel's helps to clarify our understanding of Mart's problem of civic cohesion. What Davis' relational approach reveals is that civic cohesion is not a contract, or an arrival at a set of shared values; it is a sharing that must be constantly renewed and communicated.

The Chambless Field mosaic mural, and the community arts methods that inform its composition, are a productive response to Mart's wicked solidarity problem and a means of "writing community": the ongoing and sustainable transformation of relationships between people and the culture and lived environment they share. This is accomplished by the project at the Chambless Field through the collaborative process of building a work of art that is symbolically rich yet open to interpretation, and that rewrites an abandoned space to become a site of communal gathering and ongoing solidarity building. It is a text that indexes participants involvement, daily life in Mart, and the themes of shared passion and conflict. However, it resists a reading that closes down on any of those themes. It does so by bringing the viewer, space, and text of mural into relation to each other in a way that is rich in meaning but forecloses any final interpretation. To understand how that mural came about, we must first briefly return to the difficult month of August, 2010.

The North Pearl St. Mural

The week before Patricia's dramatic departure on August 20, 2010 a number of significant events happened that helped changed the course of the MCP. After weeks of being refused entry into Mart's unused storefronts, two properties suddenly became available to us. A local couple, Cowboy and Evelyn Clawson, gave us the free use of a closed commercial space on North Pearl Street, about fifty yards from the intersection with Texas Avenue. A large property that extends the length of a city block, the building consists of two long and narrow rooms in the front that open up to a large storage space in the rear. Its puzzling design is the result of many changes of business and ownership over several decades. The other property that became available to the MCP was Chambless Field, which will be discussed in detail below.

Those fortuitous events coincided with the arrival of visual artist, Muhsana Ali. From Philadelphia, Muhsana now lives in Dakar, Senegal, with her husband Amadou Kane Sy (known as Kensi), a Senegalese artist of international repute, and their three children. Paula met Muhsana in Senegal, and was impressed by how Muhsana combined education, community development, and art.

Muhsana and her entire family would become long-standing members of the MCP and welcome visitors in Mart, and are key figures in the realization of the mural on Chambless Field. During the polarized weeks of 2010, however, Muhsana's arrival fueled the already intense atmosphere that surrounded the project. Before Muhsana got to work, it was difficult to explain why the MCP chose to fly in an artist from Africa to work in Mart, and her arrival fueled speculation that the MCP was mismanaging Dulaney funds and seemed to further confirm the African - American bias of the project.

Image 2.4 Artist Muhsana Ali

Image: Sean McCarthy

Those speculations would not disappear quickly, but they certainly began to recede once Muhsana began work on the MCP's first successful community arts initiative, the mosaic mural on the building on North Pearl Street. The process of making the mural is briefly described in the slides below:

By drawing on Zagar's use of found and personal objects, Muhsana was able to build relationships with Mart residents by visiting garage sales. The possibility that keepsakes and objects that would otherwise be thrown away could end up in a public art work naturally stimulated people's curiosity. The mosaic and Senegalese glass painting methods invited participation in the mural itself, turning the North Pearl St. Building into an informal art class and community hub. Passersby would visit to donate objects, help break down large pieces of old pottery or mirror and insert them into the wall, and the more adventurous participants

Gallery 2.3 The North Pearl St. mosaic mural

Muhsana Ali and a Mart resident working on the mosaic mural at the MCP headquarters on North Pearl St. In Mart.

created their own glass paintings that would end up in the mural itself.

The final product was a success, albeit a limited one. Since the building was tucked away on North Pearl St, it didn't have the same visual impact on daily life in Mart had we managed to secure a building on Texas Avenue. Furthermore, that building proved to be structurally unsound, so the MCP couldn't use it as a base. However, the beauty of the final product generated publicity through the Mart Messenger and helped to defray the intense criticisms that the project suffered over the preceding weeks. Throughout the following months, the MCP would build on that reversal of fortune by building a highly successful network of service learning projects with undergraduate and graduate classes at the University of Texas, Austin (the focus of the chapter that follows).

The combination of those events resulted in an event in January 2011 that six months earlier would have seemed unthinkable. The Dulaney Foundation endorsed the MCP for the second time, awarding us $20,000 to implement another mosaic mural at Chambless Field, to which we now turn.

Section 4

The Chambless Field Mural

In my account of the MCP's experiments in August 2010, I attempted to demonstrate how absence and silence serve to reveal the seething presence of the wicked problem we were trying to solve. As one of the MCP's most successful ventures, the Chambless Field mural demands a different response. First, I present a nine-minute video clip that is an early draft of a long-form documentary project about the Chambless Field project, which I then follow with an analysis that speaks to the themes this chapter presents, and fills in some important contextual information that is missing from the video clip. What I hope the clip achieves is an appreciation of the mosaic mural and of Mart itself that is difficult if not impossible to capture in narrative form. As Alex Reid argues, video and other forms of multimedia writing are structures of exposure that reveal language's limits (Reid 2009); I propose this clip will offer an appreciation of the richness of Chambless Field experience that narrative alone could not provide.

A brief gloss of the video will help to contextualize it. It is a rough cut of a short documentary currently in production that attempts to tell the story of the Chambless Field mural. It contains footage that was filmed during the construction of the mural over the last weekend of August, and its official unveiling on Sunday, August 27, and from the day of the Mart Panthers' homecoming game on Friday, October 7, 2011. That was not a planned gathering; the people captured on camera that day came to see the mural out of curiosity before the game. In its current form, these events are not sequenced in chronological fashion; they are woven together to give a more impressionistic representation of the Chambless Field project. In its current draft form, the clip is not of professional standard, yet is the result of hours of shooting, post-processing and editing by a number of non-professionals.[2] As such, this video is also acknowledgement of the collaborative ethos of the MCP and the painstaking and time-intensive work work of multimedia writing.

Movie 2.2 The MCP documentary short

Video production & postproduction: Sean McCarthy, Abehja Kibuuka, Jonathan Davis, and UT students Eric and Thomas.

The video clip documents a small number of people working on the mural during that weekend in August, 2011. As I mentioned in the introduction, it was a diverse group. Muhsana Ali and her husband Kensi were the professional artists who oversaw the mosaic mural's construction. Local participants, whose real names I will reserve, were: Margaret and her daughter Fiona, passionate pro-life advocates who lived across the road from Chambless Field; Mary, a local resident who creates art using stained glass; Bill, a pastor at one of Mart's Baptist churches, and his wife Jeanette. The Austin crew consisted of me; Paula; Heidi Schmalbach (a graduate student in urban planning) and her partner David; and Carlos, a carpenter from Austin and associate of Paula, who was so enamored with the idea of the MCP's work in Mart that he gave his services for two days free of charge (and at the time of writing is attempting to relocate there permanently with his family). Of course, the other participants in the mural's construction were the objects that were applied to the wall. As Kensi humorously explains in the video, the broken pieces of pottery, fragments of mirror, and Senegalese glass paintings formed the palette from which the mosaic mural emerged. What the video doesn't reveal is the importance of time in bringing all the participants together. Our brief exploration of the mosaic mural on North Pearl St. shows how Muhsana slowly created networks with the Mart community by going to garage sales to collect materials and establish a presence in town. Following that project's success, Paula rightly diagnosed that a

Image 2.5 Amadou Kane Sy (Kensi) and Mushana Ali in the garage at the MCP house in Mart.

Image: Sean McCarthy

Gallery 2.4 Mosaic murals in Mart.

The concession stand at Chambless Field

Image: Sean McCarthy

regular presence in town was a necessary component to the ongoing success of the project. Consequently, part of our Dulaney funds were spent on renting a house in Mart for the summer of 2011. Muhsana and her husband Kensi were contracted to work on murals for the high school cafeteria and at Chambless Field, and they arrived in June with their three children and took up residence in the MCP's new rented home.

During the morning and evening hours when the summer heat was not at its peak, the garage door was nearly always open showing the artists at work. As the summer progressed, people of all ages would drop by to paint, break pottery for the mural mosaics, or just hang out. The house not only provided the MCP with a base; it facilitated the important work of slowly building relationships with locals that Muhsana's networking at garage sales had initiated the year before. Through repeated activities that had neither a pre-determined outcome nor strict rules for participation, the everyday quality of the work facilitated relationship building that had no explicit aim other than the process of making the mural. This relationship building was accomplished by encouraging people to gather in shared activity that allowed space for the contentless relations that undergird communication to do their work.

The interview clips in the video indicate that those participants had various relationships to the building of the mural. Paula interprets the work in the context of the symbolic richness of Chambless Field, and Fiona explains how art is color-blind and may help to heal the racial tensions in Mart. In contrast, Mary's on-camera explanation for involvement was as an artist, and Carlos declined to be interviewed on camera. The common denominator in those responses is the activity of the art-making itself, which provides a shared goal that does not rely on an explicitly stated understanding of the mural's purpose or function. The themes of Mart's divided history and shared passion certainly emerge in the finished product of the mural, but the process of making the mural does not determine the participants' relationship to those themes.

The time it took to build relationships is evident throughout the mosaic mural. Chips of mirror, Senegalese glass paintings by the artists and local residents, names of participants, personal curios, and fragments of discarded pottery crowd the mosaic mural's surface. Their materiality and ordinariness represent an archive of the everyday rhythms and exchanges that structured the building of the mural.

The placement of those objects on the wall of the concession stand put the everyday process of making the mural serve to expose and rewrite the shared passions and conflicted histories that are encoded in the symbolic site of Chambless Field, as the next section demonstrates.

Gallery 2.5 A detail from the mosaic mural

Image: Sean McCarthy

Rhythmic Relations: Football, Memory, and the Chambless Field

Football is a religion in Mart. The Mart Panthers are consistently one of the most successful teams in their division and are an immense source of pride in town. As the video shows, the parades and home games draw huge crowds locally, and people who no longer live in Mart return for the homecoming games. Named after Harry Chambless, a former coach of the Mart Panthers, Chambless Field was Mart's football field from 1933 until it was abandoned in favor of a green field site near the Middle School in 2007. Until August 2011, it was one of Mart's many abandoned spaces; as the panning shots in the video reveal, the goal posts have been taken down, and only the foundations of the bleachers remain.

Image 2.6 The Footballer

Image: Sean McCarthy

Despite its current dilapidated state, the field is a site of rich potential for a community art project and communal gathering space. Located in the center of town just off Texas Avenue, it has

three structurally sound buildings, a large, two-roomed concession stand and two dressing rooms, that flank three of its

Image 2.7 Detail from the mural

Image: Sean McCarthy

four corners. More importantly, the field has much cultural and historical significance. As the interview clips taken on the day of the homecoming game reveal, the field a significant site of shared memory. That memory bears the weight of Mart's historical legacy of racism. Until desegregation, the black football team played on Thursdays, leaving the Friday night lights the exclusive privilege of the white team. Although the passage of time and the relocation to the new green field site has decoupled Mart football culture from its racist past, Chambless Field remains a symbol of a divided and painful history.

Mart's passion for football features prominently among the flow of objects and images that flow through the mosaic mural wall. Boots, legs, and footballs are scattered throughout the bands of color that flow across the wall. On the northeastern gable end, those fragments of Mart's football culture converge in the mural's most arresting image, the life-size football player. He is portrayed as if running out onto the field, his movement enhanced by the light reflected off the fragments of mirror that surround the image.

Other fragments of Mart's history are woven into the mural. Glass paintings of the schools, representations of artifacts on display at the Nancy Nail library, and religious imagery are scattered across the wall. The representation of Mart's history and culture is pointedly different from the exhibit in the library, however. As I have suggested in the introduction, the organization of objects in the library form a narrative that expose Mart's difficult history rather than celebrate it.

The random placement of objects on the mural refuse any kind of linear reading. Instead, they are unified by the shape and movement of the bands of color and fragments of mirror that flow across the mural's surface. As Kensi says in the video clip, the mural functions like jazz; the integrity of the piece is based upon rhythm rather narrative.

A rhythmic appreciation of how cultural information is coded into the mural helps to illuminate how complex cultural dynamics

can’t and won’t be fixed into place by language. The images, fragments of texts and pottery, and ornamental curiosities provide snippets of melodies to private histories and shared affiliations. Those melodies move to the polyrhythmic beat of artistic practices that have travelled from South America and Africa. Cadences of the local and global, public and private, ordinary and symbolic, contemporary and historical are woven into the spatial plane of the mosaic mural. These rhythms pulse through the viewer’s body liquidating any sense of coherence that is literally reflected in the mural’s surface. Shards of mirror offers the viewer tantalizing reflections of parts of their own body, but refuse complete identification. A coherent, objectified self melts into the flow of objects and color. Following Davis, the mural is a performance of a the structure of exposure, an appreciation of communication, writing “at the limit”: a rhythmic sharing that occurs prior to any melodic scoring of experience.

Of course, this explicitly rhetorical reading of the mural does not necessarily surface in everyone’s experience of being in Chambless Field. The interview segments in the video clip show a range of different responses. On the day of the homecoming game, footballers who wandered into Chambless were happy to recount their memories of games decades before. People viewing the mural could appreciate its aesthetic qualities without being able to describe what it is or why it’s there. The content of people’s reactions are secondary to visitors’ fluid relationship to the space and each other; the mural rhythmically distributes its

Image 2.8 The “Interactive Wall” at Chambless Field

Passersby are encouraged to write up suggestions about how to change Mart on the chalkboards.

Image:Sean McCarthy

effects such that it provokes responses but does not predetermine them.

In the video clip, Paula talks about toward how the project at Chambless attempts to uncover the past at the mural’s unveiling

ceremony, but that certainly doesn't mean that it's just a memorial. The space seems to have a kind of gravitational pull; everybody on the MCP team was a little surprised at the number of people who simply wandered into the field on the day of the homecoming game in October 2011. We don't know how many people drop by on a weekly basis, but whenever we return to Mart there are always new ideas scribbled onto the chalk board about how to improve town. Sometimes those requests are practical (a pool) and often mundane (a mall); the very surface of the concession stand invites passersby to respond to it in writing.

Image 2.9 My hopes for Chambless Field

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Predictably, Chambless has already become a place of pilgrimage for the MCP-affiliated classes that come to Mart to do field work. The football field does the heavy lifting for instructors, as the space is by design far more eloquent in describing the relational approach of the MCP than any of the project's researchers. The MCP's relationship with UT is an important part of its responsiveness to wicked problems, as the following chapters will show.

Image 2.10 Paula writing on the "interactive wall" at Chambless Field

Image: Sean McCarthy

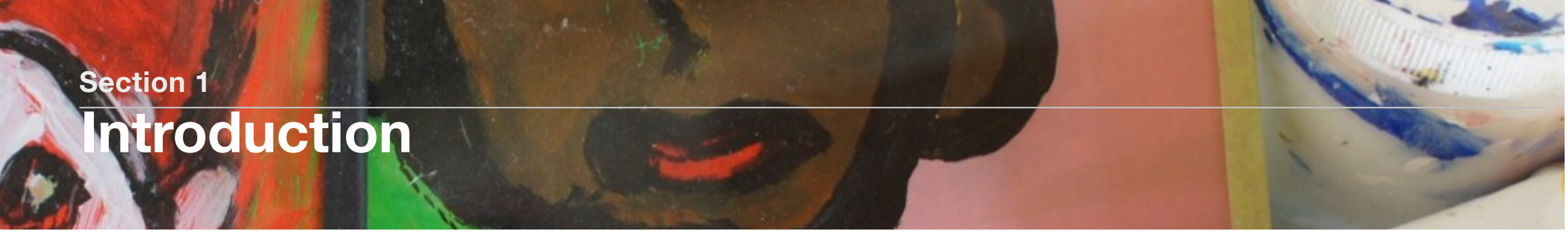
Endnotes

1. The role that community arts plays in rural sustainability and change is well documented across a number of disciplines, government-funded studies, and nonprofit interventions. For a comprehensive bibliography of sources, visit “The Arts and Humanities in Rural America,” National Agricultural Library. Webpage: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/artspub.html>. Accessed June 25, 2012.

2. The video footage was shot by me, Paula’s son Jonathan, and two UT students from my Fall 2011 *Writing for Nonprofits* class, Eric and Thomas. That considerable amount of footage has been honed through several rounds of editing by me, Jonathan, Eric, and a New York-based professional video editor, Abehja Kibuuka. (Abehja is related to Paula through the Davis family, and has agreed to help us develop a professional documentary short in order to apply for funding for a more comprehensive documentary treatment of the MCP.)

Chapter 2

Participatory Engagement as Wicked Response



Section 1

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I suggested that the community arts endeavors launched by the MCP are a form of "writing community," a key component to what I'm positing as a wicked response to Mart's wicked problem. Community arts is just the first of two major approaches to the relational civic engagement that the MCP practices. The second approach is the facilitation of undergraduate and graduate service learning classes in which university students design and carry out a variety of projects in Mart. Across the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters, 44 students from UT and 320 students from Mart High School and Mart Middle School participated in 25 projects in Mart. These ventures ranged across such diverse areas as literacy programs, digital media workshops, theatre and visual arts courses, community arts and town beautification projects, and building restoration and community garden initiatives. Bringing in students to work in Mart presented challenges, some unique to this context and others that anyone likely faces when (carefully) implementing civic learning pedagogies. Mart's wicked problem — as I've already described (or at least attempted to approximate) at length elsewhere in this dissertation — resists language and clear problem solving strategies. Particularly given the limited time frame of the college semester, it was thus a tricky proposition to ask/require university students to become involved in complex and often-ambitious projects aimed to make a meaningful impact for Mart residents while still providing the students with beneficial educational experiences.

In this chapter I theorize how university/off-campus partnerships can be designed to effectively respond to wicked problems and yet still be aligned with the formal demands of the college curriculum. To do so, I begin by outlining the achievements of three classes that worked with the MCP during the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters. I argue that these classes became central to the MCP's wicked response by constituting a network of relationships that blurred the usually well-demarcated boundaries between academic disciplines, between student/teacher/researcher identities, between process and product, between academy and community, and between "university-time" (strictly bounded class times and semesters) and the "24x7x365-time" that wicked problems exist in. I then place the MCP's service learning experiments in the context of previous scholarship on service learning in higher education to

demonstrate how the practical and political difficulties faced by those conducting service learning around the globe are similar to what the MCP faced on the local level. I go on to suggest and describe that the MCP's methods can be productively generalized to assist others committed to service learning by examining them through the lens of "participatory cultures."[1] I finish this chapter by synthesizing a number of key aspects of the MCP's relational approach to service learning to articulate a form of "participatory engagement" that draws on institutional resources yet is not easily placed within them, and that fulfills standard curricular requirements but is also supple and responsive to conditions beyond campus. In short, this chapter describes how participatory engagement sparked from well-curated university/off-campus partnerships can be a generative response to a given wicked problem.

Section 2

Blurring Boundaries: The MCP Service Learning Classes

Later in this chapter, I will marshal the rhetorical support of digital media theorists such as Henry Jenkins to show how the MCP's service learning classes became a flexible model of participatory engagement. For now, the most elegant way to introduce the concept is to provide a multimedia overview of the classes involved: a Fall Semester 2010 iteration of "Writing for Nonprofits" (WFNP) taught by Dr. Alice Batt in the Department of Rhetoric and Writing, and the fall and spring iterations of "Cross-Disciplinary Global Project Development: U. S. and Abroad" (CDGD) taught by Professor Dorie Gilbert and Paula Gerstenblatt in the School of Social Work. I will give a brief introduction and history of the assessment methods and use of multimedia for the WFNP class, as these become key components in the MCP's arsenal. Both sections of the CDGD class developed an array of projects, and I represent them here in slideshow format. The (purposeful) disruption of narrative continuity in this section of the chapter aims to reflect the messy, emergent quality of the work accomplished through these classes. It should also give readers a sense of the somewhat chaotic experience of engaging with a wicked problem, which is precisely what these students and instructors did in the 2010-2011 academic year and beyond.

Writing for Nonprofits (WFNP)

"Writing for Nonprofits" is a course that fulfills UT's service learning and substantial writing credit flag requirements.[2] The objectives of the course as outlined in the 2010 syllabus were to learn and practice genres of writing required in professional nonprofit work such as grant proposal and feature writing, press releases, mission statements, and annual reports (Batt 2010). The course is structured around students assessing the writing needs of local nonprofit organizations, and then composing a variety of documents for them. During the Fall 2010 semester, students partnered with the Austin Clubhouse, a nonprofit that supports Austin residents with debilitating psychological and psychiatric conditions, and the MCP.

The MCP collaboration involved students of the WFNP class working with the CDGD students and instructors to write a grant to Humanities Texas to fund an oral history project based around memories of Chambless Field, the text of which is included the following slideshow. In November, members of both

classes also participated in a “media blitz” field trip that Paula and I designed. Over the course of a day, UT students walked around town taking photographs and conducting informal interviews with willing Mart residents, which were placed in a Google Map during a class the following week.

Gallery 3.1 The GoogleMap and Media Blitz

Images: Sean McCarthy

Cross-Disciplinary Global Project Development U.S. and Abroad (CDGD)

According to the syllabus, “this course introduces students to the challenges and successes of sustainable project development, both locally and abroad, with an emphasis on meaningful collaboration” (Gilbert and Gerstenblatt 2010). Open to graduates and undergraduate students, the course also fulfilled UT’s service learning and substantial writing credit flag requirements. The course was structured around collaborative project work in local communities as well as core readings on community development and civic engagement. The course text, *Beginner’s Guide to Community Based Arts* (Knight and Schwarzman 2006), explores the implementation of community arts projects in community engagement initiatives. It provides an overview and step-by-step implementation of the CRAFT model of community engagement. CRAFT is an acronym for a popular and effective model of community engagement practiced by the visual arts and social sciences: Contact, Research, Action, Feedback, and Training. Assignments for the course for both Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters included academic papers on community engagement theory and methods, reflection exercises, field trips, and a final project designed and implemented by the students in Mart with guidance from Paula. The following two slideshows give an overview of the projects.

Gallery 3.2 CDGD Fall 2010 projects

Masonic Hall restoration project: *Built in the 1890s, the African American Masonic hall was by 2010 in desperate need of repair. This project involved seeking funding for its restoration, locating engineers, raising awareness about the plight of the hall in the local newspaper, researching the history of the Prince Hall Masons, and working with the remaining masons to preserve documents. The building has since been deemed unsound; depending on funding, it may be torn down and rebuilt.*

Image: CDGD students final powerpoint presentation

Gallery 3.3 CDGD Spring 2011 Projects

Art Exhibition: One enterprising CDGD student organized an arts collaboration between Mart High School students and residents of the Texas Juvenile Detention facility (which is located on the outskirts of Mart). The student who ran this project worked with the City Council, the Mart Independent School District manager, and the Texas Youth Commission to organize this program, which culminated in an exhibition that was attended by over fifty people.

This summary of the MCP service learning activities over the 2010-2011 academic year provides a sense of the emerging shape of what I call (and will later explain in detail) participatory engagement. A number of important patterns can be observed over the year's enterprises. First, there was a blurring of disciplinary boundaries. The fall collaboration gave rhetoric and composition students in a class focused on specific writing outcomes the experience of responding to a wicked problem. Because the MCP's approach to civic cohesion in Mart is very open-ended, WFNP students had to work closely with Paula and visit Mart to get a clear sense of how to frame the grant. Both classes met through the "media blitz" event in November; media thus became a conduit for interdisciplinary collaboration that helped to produce multiple perspectives on Mart's wicked problem. This is evident in the co-authored Google Map.

Because of its community development focus, the CDGD class contained members from many fields of study, and most of them brought a specific disciplinary perspective to their work in Mart. Heidi, for example, chose to write a design-focused grant to the National Endowment for the Arts, which reflected her background in urban planning and design. Of course, engaging with Mart's wicked problem of civic cohesion enabled this cross-disciplinary fertilization to occur. Although this was not necessarily apparent at the time, the MCP's singular lack of a defined focus in Mart enabled students to develop projects that had disciplinary homes all over the place: in social work, engineering, urban planning and design, transportation, theatre, and rhetoric and writing.

Clearly, no one instructor could possibly have expertise in all of these areas. Consequently, student, teacher, and researcher identities became fluid. For example, the community garden and irrigation project that Abraham designed in the spring of 2011 would have been impossible without his engineering experience and expertise. Paula and Dr. Gilbert provided the context for that project through teaching him the CRAFT model of community engagement. All parties learned from each other. My own relationship to these classes also stands outside traditional academic roles. Although I did not teach any of the classes, I was involved in brokering the relationship between the WFNP and the fall iteration of the CDGD class, and I facilitated the media blitz and Google Map collaboration.

I also became a consultant on the spring iteration of the spring CDGD class when I helped Paula and Dr. Gilbert implement an assessment methodology called the Learning Record and the use of wikis as a class website. Dr. Batt had used these tools with the WFNP class the previous semester, and the CDGD instructors were impressed with how these tools might enable them to facilitate and support collaborative projects. The origins of that adoption are worth explicating briefly, as they are important to understand how the various classes participating with the MCP began to form a participatory engagement network.

During the Fall semester of 2009, Dr. Batt's Writing for Nonprofits class was taught concurrently with my own class called "Writing in Digital Environments." Dr. Batt and I used wikis and the Learning Record to help explore pedagogical strategies for cooperative learning through the the writing of grants, the creation of media texts (such as interactive maps), and the forming of off-campus partnerships. Stemming from this collaboration, we submitted an entry to UT's Innovative Instructional Technology Awards Program (IITAP) called "Writing for Nonprofits in Digital Environments." This project earned us institutional support and recognition, and was awarded the "Top Honor for Accomplishment in Instructional Impact." The following video prepared by the IITAP organizers succinctly explains the project.

Movie 3.1 Writing for Nonprofits in Digital Environments

Video: Sean McCarthy, Alice Batt, IITAP staff.

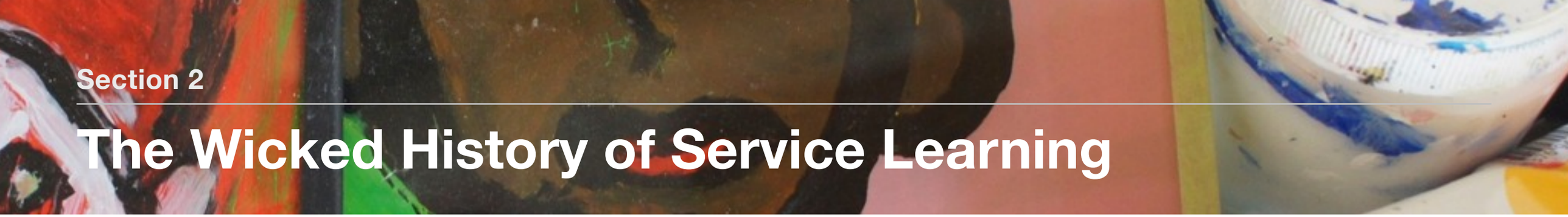
Through trial and error, "Writing for Nonprofits in Digital Environments" arrived at a flexible methodology to help concurrently running classes work with off-campus partners using shared social media and assessment methods. The fruits of that project have since been adopted by all of the classes that are associated with the MCP, presented at national conferences, and shared with other instructors who are interested in civic engagement and collaborative learning at UT. The curious journey of the Learning Record and social media tools through MCP-related service learning classes and across the disciplines suggests that serendipity and chance play a vital role in this story.

Traditional markers of the academic calendar also lost their definition amidst the MCP-affiliated service learning classes. In typical goal-oriented one-semester classes, the students disappear at the end of the semester. However, because the MCP's relationship with Mart lacked time boundaries, instructors could mix and match methodologies to respond to the relationship's always evolving structure. Similarly, students could participate according to their passion and ability, and that allowed for enduring relationships between certain committed students and the MCP. Heidi Schmalbach and Anne McNamee have continued to to be key members of the MCP personnel. Upon the successful "Your Town" Grant application, Heidi stayed on with the MCP to organize the workshop for November 2011. Similarly, Anne decided that Mart and the MCP's work there would become her Masters thesis project. Lynn Osgood's design workshops with

students at Mart Middle School presents a further variation on this theme; a doctoral candidate in UT's School of Architecture, she had nothing to do with either of the MCP-related classes and only became involved with the project when Heidi sought her advice for the NEA grant.

The blurring of boundaries of identity, time, and discipline may be generative in building an agile and creative response to complex problems in collaborative civic engagement projects, but the lack of definition also has its more ambiguous effects. As the slideshows above indicate, many of the CDGD projects never came to fruition. Some, such as the co-op experiment, just didn't work as designed, and others floundered because of funding or other issues. I argue that all of the projects were still successful, though, and that the success of the projects simply lay elsewhere: student learning occurred in each case, and key relationships were fostered and sustained with interested Mart stakeholders such as the schools and city council. From working and conversing with students over several semesters, reading their Learning Records and course evaluations, and hearing feedback from the other instructors, it has become abundantly clear to me that the majority of the students learned to appreciate relationship building and process as a far more persuasive index of success than the outcome of the individual projects themselves. And relationships, as I argued in the previous chapter and throughout this dissertation, are central to an effective response to a wicked problem.

In both its content and its presentation, the above journey through the 2010-2011 academic year probably seems a little too chaotic to be organized into a generalizable theory, and perhaps implies how being in the middle of it at the time felt like being caught in a storm. (Students' learning records and course evaluations support this notion). As this description — and the community arts projects discussed in the previous chapter — demonstrate, responding to a wicked problem doesn't yield results that are immediately legible. Then again, service learning isn't exactly the most legible body of knowledge either. Yet as it is the institutional context within which the MCP classes are broadly situated, I feel compelled to rehearse a version of service learning's genealogy here.



Section 2

The Wicked History of Service Learning

For over two decades now, service learning has been an integral component of the higher education civic engagement (HECE) movement, a shift often credited to Ernest L. Boyer's influential 1990 publication, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate*. Boyer persuasively argued that the academy must fulfill its historic responsibility "to become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems" (11). This commitment can be traced back to the Morrill Land Grant Act signed by President Lincoln in 1862, which mandated that higher education in the U.S. must focus on agricultural, technological, and industrial progress. The Land Grant Act was among many antecedents to HECE, as was the civil rights movements of the 1960s, which eventually resulted in a nationwide push toward volunteer student service in the 1980s. This volunteerism ethos was formalized on a national level through the emergence of organizations such as the Campus Outreach Opportunity League in 1984 and the Campus Compact in 1985, and both the 1990 National and Community Service and the 1993 Community Service Trust legislative acts.

Service learning in theory and practice moved away from its roots in volunteerism in the 1980s toward being more integrated into the curriculum in the 1990s. In her influential 1996 book, *Service Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices*, education scholar Barbara Jacoby defines service learning as "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (5). Service learning thus shifted from volunteerism's emphasis on the acquisition of practical skills needed for a particular work environment toward a curriculum-focused, critical understanding of civic responsibility. In their important 2000 article for the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, "Meaningful Measurement of Theory-Based Service-Learning Outcomes," Robert G. Bringle and Julie A. Hatcher further clarify this trend toward service learning:

> *Unlike extracurricular voluntary service, service learning is a course-based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related*

> *to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentation. Unlike practice and internships, the experiential activity in a service learning course is not necessarily skill-based within the context of professional education. (222)*

In contrast to the "plug and play" aspect of volunteerism, service learning tends to address complex problems that mobilize academic knowledge in applied contexts. Easy solutions are less important than understanding the complexity of the issues addressed; there are rarely right or wrong answers in a service learning assignment. Success is indexed by students' personal engagement with the issues rather than a demonstrated mastery of a specialized domain of knowledge.

Other than separating service learning from volunteerism, it is incredibly difficult to get a handle on how service learning has been interpreted across the disciplines. Jane Kendall, President of the North Carolina Center for Nonprofit Organizations, notes in her 1990 *Combining Service and Learning: A Resource Book for Community and Public Service* that by the end of the 1980s there were already 147 definitions of service learning at play across the university (3). Kendall notes that this can be a vexing state of affairs for the scholar (such as myself) who wishes to either become involved in service learning as a teacher or researcher or to provide a rigorous scholarly account of its theory and methods.

Thomas Deans, one of composition's foremost scholars of service learning and community engagement, has responded to this problem by interpreting the broad trends in the scholarship across the disciplines in order to develop a taxonomy of approaches to service learning in rhetoric and composition. In "English Studies and Public Service" (2000), Deans suggests that service learning can be defined along a continuum of writing for, about, and with community (107). Although Deans acknowledges that these categories are not necessarily distinct, they provides a useful heuristic for understanding broader approaches to service learning across the university. This allows for a clearer understanding of where the MCP's service learning component sits both within and beyond that continuum.

Three Paradigms for Community Writing

	Writing for Community	Writing about Community	Writing with community
Primary site for Learning	Nonprofit agency	Classroom	Community Center
Privileged Literacies	Academic and workplace literacies	Academic and critical literacies	Academic, community, and hybrid literacies
Most highly valued discourse	Workplace discourse	Hybrid courses	Student-community member (instructor as facilitator)
Primary learning relationship	Student-agency contact (instructor as facilitator)	Student-instructor (service as facilitator)	Student-community member (instructor as facilitator)
Institutional Relationship	Instructor-agency contact person	Instructor-community site contact	Instructor/department-community center
Goals	1. Students learn nonacademic writing practices and reflect on differences between academic and workplace rhetorics. 2. Students reflect on service experience to attain critical awareness of community needs. 3. Students provide needed writing products for agencies.	1. Students serve at schools or community sites and reflect on their experiences 2. Students develop critical consciousness and habits of intellectual inquiry and societal critique. 3. Students write journals and compose academic-style essays on community issues and/or pressing social concerns.	1. Students, faculty, and community use writing as part of a social action effort to collaboratively identify and address local problems. 2. Students and community members negotiate cultural differences and forge shared discourses 3. University and community share inquiry and research.
Assessment	•Can students move ably between academic and workplace discourses? •Have students critically reflected on the writing and service processes? •Did students produce documents that will be of real use to agencies	•Have students provided adequate service to the community site? •How sophisticated a critique of social concerns can students demonstrate in academic discussion and writing? •Has student academic writing improved?	•Have local and academic community members engaged in collaborative writing or research? •Can students reflect critically on issues such as cultural difference? •Has the local problem been effectively solved, addressed, or researched?

Source: Deans, “English Studies and Public Service” (2000)

As this table shows, writing *for* is about active participation in the community, often by students collaborating with understaffed nonprofit agencies. In the introduction to the important anthology, *Writing and Community Engagement* (2010), Deans, Roswell, and Wurr describe how scholars Jim Dubinsky and Thomas Deans give their students assignments to create newsletters, grants, and promotional materials for nonprofit organizations (Deans, Roswell and Wurr 3). Writing *about* community, in contrast, asks students to use their off-campus experiences to develop critical consciousness and the writing skills necessary to build persuasive critiques of social injustice. For instance, scholars such as Cheryl Duffy, Bruce Herzberg, and Ann Green provide opportunities for their writing students to work at homeless shelters and nursing homes (Deans, Roswell and Wurr 3). Students then use those experiences to produce written responses that critically reflect on community needs. In "Service Learning and Social Change: The Case for Materialist Rhetoric," David Coogan challenges the field to teach students not only to write for discrete projects with off-campus partners, but also to teach students how "authority translates into arguments that make a difference in institutional practices, government policy, public opinion, or some other sector of the public sphere" (212). By championing writing *about* community, Coogan joins service learning scholars across the disciplines who wish to push beyond the boundaries of "service" toward a critical engagement with structures of power and governance.

The third term in Deans' triad, writing *with,* is perhaps the most complex of the three, and best represents the focus of the field as it currently stands. Deans acknowledges that writing *with* community eludes easy classification, but that it often takes the form of a grassroots approach that involves students and researchers collaborating with off-campus partners on pressing and ongoing social issues (2000, 110). Composition and literacy scholar Eli Goldblatt's work with the Open Doors Collaborative in Philadelphia is a good example of such a model. Goldblatt's approach to engagement involves carefully cultivating relationships, building capacity, and leveraging university resources such as service learning classes for the local partners' benefit when possible (Long, 112). Once trust and reciprocity have been established, Goldblatt employs his skills as a rhetorician to help focus on articulating and defining problems, advising on drafts of proposal and grant documents, and facilitating structured dialogue (Long, 112-114).

Since the 1990s, writing *with* has signaled a relational turn in service learning away from an analysis of semester-bound education experiences at the classroom level toward a broader investigation of a university's relationships with off-campus partners, which are often intricately linked relationships at the university and national level. The definitional crisis that Kendall notes afflicted service learning the 1990s therefore waxes rather than wanes. Service learning becomes tangled with faculty research (often referred to as community engagement) and civic

engagement (which is the term often described to denote the university's social responsibility on a national and even global scale).[3] As Deans, Roswell, and Wurr note, "since the late 1990s, the field has realized that its agenda should be less about clearing a path for service-learning's advancement in the academy than about the *relationships* between universities and communities — in all their promise and contradictions" (3). Rather than defining effective service learning experiences, the field has become increasingly concerned with ethical and sustainable relationships with off-campus partners, how teaching and research can be effectively combined, and how productive alliances between disciplines and institutions can respond more effectively to complex social issues.

The promises of the recent relational move have resulted in the emergence of organizations on and off campus that support a wide range of engagement work. The *Imagining America* consortium is an example of a national clearinghouse that supports "artists and scholars in public life" ("Imagining America"). Centers designed to support engaged learning and research have become common on campuses nationwide. Hybrid organizations that focus interdisciplinary inquiry have pioneered exciting projects. For instance, the University of Washington's Simpson Center for the Humanities created the noteworthy Seattle Labor History and Civil Rights Project.[4] Rhetoricians Stephen Parks and Eli Goldblatt describe Temple University's Institute for the Study of Literature, Literacy, and Culture to demonstrate how writing across the disciplines programs can promote campus-wide engaged teaching and research opportunities between students and teachers (Parks and Goldblatt, 337-358).

This brief list of examples represents the emergence of a variety of civic engagement support systems. Yet however welcome these initiatives are, institutionally sanctioned responses often fail to keep up with off-campus partners' shifting and ambiguous needs. In a 2012 report commissioned by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the association's research director, Ashley Findley, notes that "evidence suggests that the more frequently students participate in a continuum of civic learning practices (e.g. service learning, meaningful cross-racial interactions on campus or in classrooms, or real-world problem-based learning), the more they make gains on a variety of civic outcomes" (1). Findley's findings suggest that civic education is not the sole province of the "one shot operation" of the service learning class at all, but rather occurs in formal and informal experiences on and off campus *throughout* the degree cycle.

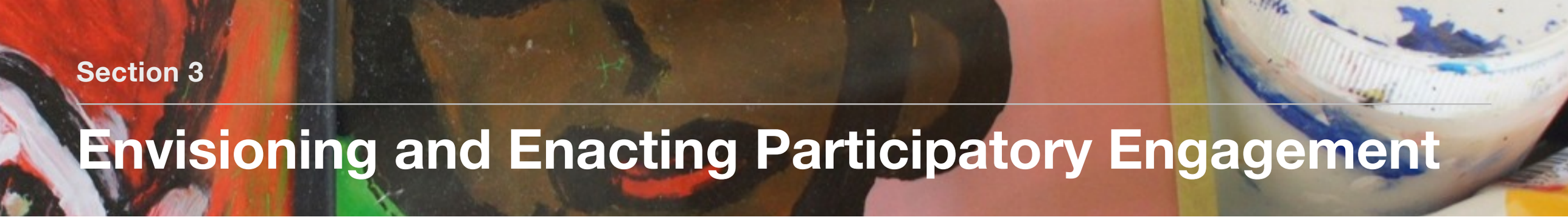
Presenting a continuum of experiences for students requires appropriate institutional support to develop and sustain off-campus partnerships. Furthermore, advocacy is essential at the departmental and college level for faculty to deliver effective engaged teaching and research. Gregory Jay, an English

Literature scholar who writes about civic engagement in the humanities, argues that such positive institutional responses are unlikely to happen quickly. It is uncommon for universities to embrace wide-scale civic engagement in the curriculum because civic engagement is resource-heavy, does not lend itself to large classes, and is difficult to sustain semester after semester (57). The segmentation and uneven distribution between scholarship, teaching, and service in standard tenure applications cannot accurately represent the fluid and consuming work required of civic-oriented teaching and research. In a report sponsored by *Imagining America* on research and tenure policy, literature scholar Julie Ellison and sociologist Tim Eatman argue that tenure applications should be designed as a portfolio that demonstrates a continuum of teaching, scholarship, and research that yield "artifacts" of public value (Ellison and Eatman 2010). While voices like Ellison and Eatman's are being heard more often today, institutional apparatuses like the tenure system are agonizingly slow to change, if not resistant to it altogether.

This broad sketch of issues that hamper relational civic engagement is hardly conclusive, but it does reveal that evolving debates surrounding the many aspects of a university's civic mission are becoming increasingly difficult to either define or solve. In *Tactics of Hope* (2005), composition scholar Paula Mathieu argues that the problem cannot be solved at all. Following Michel de Certeau, Mathieu argues that higher education institutions rely on "*strategic logics"* that favor institutional preservation above anything else (xiv). She contests that the demands and needs of "the street" — the label she assigns to social groups instead of "community" — cannot be contained by institutional self-interest: "The more we try to institutionalize the relationships between universities and neighboring streets and communities, the farther we stray from a rhetorically responsive engagement that seeks timely partnerships, which acknowledges the ever-changing spatial terrain, temporalities, and voices of individuals" (xiv). Following Michel de Certeau, Mathieu proposes that engaged scholars should accept institutional failure by adopting a "tactical orientation" that relies as little as possible on institutional mandates and support structures.

While I find most of Mathieu's conclusions logical and astute, I disagree with her suggestion that engagement practices should tactically avoid institutional mandates and support structures. In the earlier overview of the UT classes affiliated with the MCP and Mart, I indicated that the blurred boundaries and process-oriented methodologies that emerged were a response to Mart's wicked problem of civic cohesion that we were attempting to engage. Because such a problem resists definition and traditional problem solving strategies, the teachers and students who worked with the MCP over the course of the 2010-2011 academic year produced what I consider to be a *relational* response. On a local scale, that response blurred the very identity and achievement markers that afflict civic

engagement at the institutional and national levels. We didn't avoid or ignore institutional structures — we embraced them, mobilizing university resources in a way that fulfilled specific teaching and research demands.



Section 3

Envisioning and Enacting Participatory Engagement

In this chapter's last section I briefly articulate and analyze institutional culture itself as a/the wicked problem that necessitates a wicked response. This vantage point has become pivotal to the MCP's relational strategy, and is, I hope, a portable concept for other scholars and practitioners of service learning. From my experience with the MCP, I advance a theory of "participatory engagement" that is supple in its response to its off-campus partners — or tactical in Mathieu's formulation — and also embraces the resources the institutions provide without succumbing to the strategic logics that make them so slow to change. Put simply, I propose that my version of participatory engagement can be a shrewd response to institutional culture qua wicked problem.

As the above discussion of service learning and civic engagement demonstrates, the scholarship to date has been largely concerned with the relationship between institutional and off-campus partners. To understand how participatory engagement can best be developed, it is important to turn inward to look at institutional culture itself so as to think about the barriers *and* opportunities it presents. Australian sociologist Stephen Dovers is one of many scholars across the disciplines who explores how institutions and the knowledge systems they rely on function and can be reformed.[5] Dovers' analysis is useful for the purposes of this chapter because he identifies how institutions face the immense challenge of sustaining themselves within the increasingly complex environments in which they are situated. He suggests that contemporary institutional change requires "bridging scales and knowledges; yet each scale and each knowledge culture uses a different reference point and a different language," (82) which of course makes consensus difficult. Sustainability is an historical problem, according to Dovers; institutions like the University were built during considerably less complex times, and weren't designed to respond to the massive information flows of the digital world. He argues that the institution's longevity is itself a challenge because institutional structures are simultaneously the cause and the prime means of addressing social, economic, and environmental sustainability (183).

Dovers presents a number of strategies to diagnose and respond to the hardships that face institutions. Making explicit

the various scales in knowledge systems is vital in responding to institutional problems; this can be accomplished by a variety of methods such as mapping different scales, analyzing their usefulness, and developing theoretical and methodological means to reconcile their differences (190). Dovers argues that such methodological and theoretical heterogeneity can be facilitated by connecting disparate inquiries and experiments. "Given the complexity and uncertainty associated with sustainability problems," he argues, attention needs to be given at specific scales and across scales to create a larger body of knowledge and of policy and institutional options (190).

Dovers doesn't present clear guidelines on how connecting different disciplines and experiments can be accomplished. This is somewhat understandable considering the situated nature of every institution; indeed, to be prescriptive in response to a wicked problem is to foreclose the possibility of a generative response at all. However, the connection of disparate inquiry clearly lends itself to networks and network theory. The study of networks has become a dominant approach to analyzing complex social phenomena, in no small part because the advent of digital information networks has exponentially increased the traffic of information world-wide.[6] Yet network theory is primarily about the analysis of networks, while I'm more invested in how to produce them. I ask, if participatory engagement is to be imagined and examined as a network of sorts, how can it best be coaxed into being?

Digital humanist Scott Weingart cautions that the ubiquity and malleability of networks presents its problems to the novice scholar who wishes to conduct a network analysis. "When you're given your first hammer," he writes, "everything looks like a nail. Networks can be used on any project. Networks *should* be used on far fewer" (15). Network analysis provides multiple theoretical and methodological choices that structure research design and influence the outcomes. For instance, rhetorician and technical communications scholar Clay Spinuzzi spends the entirety of *Network* (2008) spelling out just two approaches popular in rhetoric and composition, actor network and activity theory, to show how their theoretical and methodological orientations influence every step of the research process, from the philosophical orientation of the researcher to the research outcomes. But despite the many theoretical and methodological choices available, the way I want to describe participatory engagement doesn't lend itself easily to standard network theory. In an earlier description of the MCP, I indicated that the classes working in Mart responded to the iterative, shape-shifting qualities of a wicked problem. By refusing to name the problem or identify a solution, these classes undertook work that blurred the boundaries between the standard institutional categories of student, teacher, researcher, and even discipline. Sure, one might productively study the networks of activities between these various actors, but I am more excited by the principles that led to its emergent structure. In other words, my participatory engagement methodology champions the very creation of such

civic engagement networks as a way to begin to respond to a wicked problem.

Admittedly, my term "participatory engagement" riffs on "participatory culture," a term most often associated with Henry Jenkins that has been in academic circulation for over two decades. Its earliest uses were primarily in media and communication studies and referred to what futurist Alvin Toffler referred to in *The Third Wave* (1980) as "prosumer" culture, in which passive consumption of media by consumers is replaced with the active reshaping, altering, and redistributing of those texts. Through the years, definitions of participatory culture have shifted alongside advances in technology, from the advent of the worldwide web, social media, and most recently, the "app"-driven world of mobile devices. Communications scholar Tobias Schäfer suggests that participatory culture is a complex discourse that includes "a rhetoric that advocates social progress through technological advancement" (14).[7]

Of the many and varied approaches to participatory cultures, I am most interested in Henry Jenkins' recent use of the term in theorizing social media as a tool for artistic expression and civic engagement that can be applied to formal education. Jenkins has been exploring participatory cultures since his book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), in which he analyzed the interpretive strategies, social practices, and institutions that form around fan communities of popular TV shows such as *Star Trek.* In 2006, he co-authored an influential white paper for the MacArthur foundation with Katie Clinton, Ravi Purushotma, Alice J. Robison, and Margaret Weigel, called *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century.* In that paper, Jenkins and his co-authors modified the concept to suggest how participatory cultures that form around popular entertainment products can be adapted for educational purposes.

According to Jenkins et al.,

> *A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created). (3)*

Jenkins et al. continue on to argue that a participatory culture recalibrates the focus of literacy from being a product of individual expression to one of community involvement, by weaving students' use of media outside of school with formal learning. This can be accomplished through four, interrelated principles: by encouraging formal and informal affiliations through

social media networking platforms; building knowledge by adapting multimedia genres such as the video mashup to student assignments; facilitating collaborative problem solving such as a collaboratively authored Wikipedia entry or participation in networked gaming spaces such as *World of Warcraft*; and finally, structuring a flow of media into student learning to facilitate student skills in being able to filter, synthesize, and produce new knowledge.[8]

Jenkins et al. theorize that the application of media can bridge multiple scales of learning, from individual to group activity, between leisure activities and formal learning, and connects physical spaces inside and beyond the institution through media channels. Other media and education theorists have been exploring theories of participatory culture that are less focused on media. James Paul Gee and Elizabeth Hayes, for example, reformulate participatory culture as a kind of learning through "affinity."[9] As they explain in *Language and Learning in the Digital Age*,

> There is no "official" name for this type of learning, so we will have to make one up. We will call it "passionate affinity-based learning." Passionate affinity-based learning occurs when people organize themselves in the real world and/or via the Internet (or a virtual world) to learn something connected to a shared endeavor, interest, or passion. The people have an affinity (attraction) to the shared endeavor, interest, or passion first and foremost and then to other people because of their shared affinity. (69)

Gee and Hayes' definition still rests on participatory culture's emphasis on creative learning through collaborative engagement. Their move is to structure a participatory culture around the shared passion of its participants rather than the media literacies that make the culture possible.

Gee and Hayes' modification of a participatory culture to spotlight affinity guides my theory of participatory engagement.[10] Participatory engagement is a self-organizing network of participants, interdisciplinary knowledge, tools, and spaces that emerge and shape themselves around a civic engagement partnership. Participatory engagement conforms to institutional requirements but is not confined by them; following Deans, it is an agile means of "writing with" community. A participatory engagement network responds to the wicked problem of the institution by bringing together disparate experiments and knowledges at multiple scales. It is also effective at addressing complex social problems external to the university such as Mart's wicked problem of civic cohesion, because it presents a means of delivering an ongoing response that transforms the relations that structure the problem. In the following section, these select examples from the UT civic engagement classes that I share are both analyzable data to support my theory of participatory engagement and the raw material from which I was inspired to

formulate such a theory in the first place. Rather than intending to be prescriptive in my summary advice about wicked response, I offer up these four ideas on participatory engagement as recommendations that might be carried out, either in isolation or altogether, by those similarly enmeshed in and committed to service learning.

1. Define the engagement by relationship building rather than problem solving.

As I explained in the last chapter, the MCP researchers learned some hard lessons about civic cohesion in Mart the summer prior to the 2010-2011 academic year. We figured out that civic cohesion wasn't just any old problem in Mart — in many ways, it was *the* problem, and it resisted (and continues to resist) being solved at all. Instead, the MCP had to dive into the hard work of building the kinds of relationships with Mart residents that would kindle the requisite creativity and passion to undertake the transformative work that would make their town a better place to live. As the academic year approached, the MCP researchers were faced with a difficult challenge in designing the courses that would contribute to the MCP. How could we give students a sense of achievement (and a grade) while at the same time helping them to learn that failure is part of the achievement, and that their grades would not necessarily result from the objective success of the project they designed? The answer was once again woven into the wicked problem itself: relationality. As pedagogues and co-researchers, we could accomplish our goals by building relationships between classes and letting the students find their own affinity to Mart and its problems, the work of the MCP, and what they needed and/or wanted to learn.

We couldn't have predicted how that open-ended task would unfold, but the year's work brought about some heartening results. In rising to the open-ended challenge presented to them, the students found their own affinity to the work at hand and in so doing strengthened the network of relations between UT and Mart. This network of relations became further supported with the creation of a network of classes that ran concurrently and across semesters, creating an affinity structure that provided strength and sustainability to the MCP, as well as to the ongoing response to civic cohesion in Mart.

Letting students find their own relationship to their work resulted in a variety of clever approaches to Mart's wicked problem (and to the students' own educations). Some members of the classes chose to build on their core professional training; those who ran the STRONG and Sisters of Nia support groups, for example, were graduate students in Social Work and were preparing to be counselors. In contrast, others jumped into projects that were nowhere close to their current or perceived career paths. Peter, an undergraduate Social Work major, took on the task of figuring out how to preserve the Masonic Lodge. Prior

to the project, Peter had no experience of building restoration, and during the semester he followed a journey that didn't correspond to the core work of his chosen major. He researched the history of the building, and sought the advice of engineers to build his proposal for the Masonic Lodge's restoration. Peter's story demonstrates that relational work (rather than mere problem solving) challenges the students, and in turn, they'll challenge themselves, and often rise to the challenge.

Peter's project, and others such as the co-op experiment and the community garden at the Nancy Nail Library, weren't necessarily successes in the traditional sense, though again, I maintain that they gave students valuable learning experiences. A participatory engagement network must, however, be equally attentive to the needs of the entire network, so what did Mart have to gain from a number of these stalled projects? The answer to this question lies in the relationships developed through these projects and how these relationships were sustained over a number of semesters, which the timeline of the CDGD's attempts at a community garden will serve to illustrate.

During the Fall semester of 2010, students in the CDGD class developed a plan for a community garden next to the Nancy Nail Memorial Library. The project's progress was blocked when the library's board of directors turned down the project on the grounds that they did not want to be responsible for the garden's upkeep. However, groundwork laid by that group gave students in subsequent classes the opportunity to build on the previous team's progress. In the spring semester, a graduate student called Abraham took up the challenge of the community garden, this time to be built on the grounds of the Middle School. Before he returned to graduate school, Abraham was a member of Engineers without Borders, and had worked on development projects in Mexico, Cameroon, and Panama. He used his engineering experience to modify the plans for the garden; he put his expertise in irrigation systems to good use by drawing up detailed plans for a water catchment system that could sustain the garden. He also developed workshops in the middle school to teach students the importance of water conservation and sustainability, during which he gave presentations on his work with Engineers without Borders.

The garden itself was never built for funding reasons, but the noteworthy result of the second iteration of the community garden design was the relationships it produced, some of which were unexpected. As Abraham notes in his Learning Record final, he experienced a very different aspect of community development than his training had previously given him. From the perspective of the MCP, his work facilitated a new set of relationships with the Mart Middle School (an important institution in Mart), and provided these middle school students with a valuable learning opportunity. Of course, these snapshots only provide a limited understanding of the complex web of relations that emerged over the course of the year, but these examples

suggest how affinity shapes participatory engagement: by providing space for students to find their own inroads to the project, they produce relationships that benefit the network as a whole.

2. Adopt the Learning Record, a rigorous yet generous form of student assessment.

The projects the students designed and produced in Mart were highly complex. They involved field trips, research, collaboration, and heavy administrative labor. In this screen shot from her final portfolio, “Eva” (the student who created the art fair project with the Texas Youth Commission) presents samples of work that she undertook throughout the semester. (Pinch out with your fingers to see more closely.)

Image 3.1 Eva’s List of works samples

		Spoke over e-mail and in person with Carolyn Potts and John Haigh regarding interest and involvement in the project.
TYC Project / Joint Art Exhibit Phone Calls	n/a	Spoke with Katherine Davis (TYC) an average of 2 or 3 times a week regarding the details of the art exhibit and general TYC collaboration. Spoke with Tanya Rosas (TYC) on an as needed basis regarding the details of the art exhibit and general TYC collaboration. Left messages for Shannon Eichblatt regarding the IMOU. Spoke regularly with John Haigh regarding TYC collaboration and Joint Art Exhibit on an as needed basis (average out to about 2 to 3 times a week).
Joint Art Exhibit MOU	TYC IMOU for Joint Art Exhibit.doc	Original document signed by Mart ISD Superintendent Todd Gooden and Mart City Councilman John Haigh. Document Submitted to Ms. Davis (TYC) Thursday May 12, 2011.
Joint Art Exhibit Flyer	Joint Art Exhibit Flyer.pdf	Submitted event information to classmate Laura so she could create the flyer.
Joint Art Exhibit Event	n/a	Coordinated art pickup from TYC and Mart ISD. Created a huge "thank you" card to be signed at the event for TYC youth. Also printed out pictures of the Co-op to send with the card. Picked up drinks and snacks for the event. Assisted in creating the Joint Art Exhibit (picking up art work, hanging up art, getting the event ready, etc.).
Subcommittee E-mails	11.03.09 Subcommittee Meeting E-mail Sample.tiff Subcommittee Internal E-mail Example #1.tiff Subcommittee Internal E-mail Example #2.docx	Sent e-mails to subcommittee members confirming our meeting and suppling them with the agenda. Also, casually communicated with Carolyn Potts over e-mail from time to time. (1 **example provided**) Sent and responded to e-mails with my classmates coordinating participation and documents. (2 **examples provided**)
Subcommittee Phone Calls	n/a	I took responsibility for subcommittee group member Inez Nobles. She was only able to communicate by phone and not by e-mail. We spoke about 5 or 6 times via telephone during the semester. I also speak with John Haigh regularly (on an as needed basis – averages out to about 2 or 3 times a week).
Subcommittee (Community Collaborative) Group	11.03.01 City Council Meeting Agenda Draft.docx 11.03.01 City Council Meeting Agenda Final (deadline edits).docx Email Example Prof Notes(Updates.docx	I participated in the initial formation of the group. I attended the 03/01/2011 City Council meeting and addressed council about our purpose (to form a subcommittee group). I also participated in drafting the initial agenda. (2 **examples provided**) I co-lead the subcommittee meetings with Annette and later provided updates/notes to professors. (1 **example provided**)
Subcommittee Agenda	11.03.09 Subcommittee Meeting Agenda - Draft 1 11.03.09 Subcommittee Meeting Agenda - Draft 2.docx 11.03.09 Subcommittee Meeting Agenda Final (deadline edits).docx 11.04.11 Subcommittee Meeting Agenda - Draft	I initiated and helped draft both Subcommittee Meeting Agendas for 03/09/2011 and 04/11/2011.
Community Collaboration (City of Mart / TYC / Mart ISD)	n/a	I established relationships with Mart residents, City Council members, TYC, and Mart ISD by creating a meeting with interested key players. This involved relationship building in person, over e-mails, via telephone calls, etc.. In the end, the meeting was productive and was used to brainstorm possibilities for collaboration and future projects.
TYC Letter (Community Collaboration)	TYC Letter - Draft 1 Forum (Eva).docx TYC Letter - Draft 2 Forum (Paola).docx TYC Letter - Final Forum (Gilbert).pdf	TYC requested that we submit a letter highlighting the new partnership. I drafted the initial letter and e-mailed the final to Katherine Davis (TYC) and John Haigh (Mart Councilman). There was a public forum (03/19/2011) occurring in Mart regarding budget cuts to close down certain TYC facilities. McLennan Unit I and Unit II were at risk for potential closure and this letter would show the future possibilities of their facility if they are to remain open.
UT Campus Visit	n/a	During the initial brainstorming of the visit, I asked Dr. Gilbert if the kids could visit her class and proposed using a selection process that was not discouraging to particular kids. I participated in the UT Campus Visit day.
Mart Bake Sale	n/a	I donated a canister of coffee, brought baked goods, and worked the table.
Wiki	Members of Mart – Contact Information Community Collaborative Homepage TYC (McLennan County State Juvenile Correctional Facility) Project Homepage	Created and maintained members of Mart contact page. Maintained Project Homepages and uploaded documents.
Mart Introduction Video	[redacted]	Submitted video for the UT introduction video to Mart.
Photos	***Locate the following Photo Samples under folder Course Work Samples*** **(I was unable to directly link)** • First Dinner at the Cozy Cafe • First Mart Donation Bake Sale • Mart after the rain storm May12 • Mart Middle School Presentations May12	Took photos while visiting Mart and/or during Mart related events. I included some of them in my blogs as well.

Here, Eva provides the minutes of meetings she attended, letters she wrote, a flyer she designed, her contribution to a video clip, collaboratively written documents from the class wiki, numerous emails she wrote to the staff members of the Texas Youth Commission, and comments she shared in response to classmates' blog posts on other projects. The sheer variety of tasks she undertook and the multiple types of data that she amassed to illustrate her efforts would ordinarily present an overwhelming challenge to a course instructor: how can one assess student learning in highly complex and experimental engagement work?

Fortunately, after the "Writing for Nonprofits in Digital Environments" project and the crossover between the WFNP and CDGD classes during the Fall 2010 semester, every university class involved in projects in Mart committed to using the Learning Record as its system of assessment. Adapted by composition scholar Margaret Syverson from a model originally designed to aid and document literacy and language learning among immigrant children in inner-city London, the Learning Record is an evidence-based assessment system now widely used in writing-intensive classes in the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at UT. The Learning Record requires students to collect evidence of their progress over the entire semester in the form of interviews, work samples, and brief "observations." The following table explains the Learning Record structure:

<Insert Learning Record Table>

Demographic Data (Part A): At the beginning of the semester, students enter demographic information in the form of an interview with a parent or friend about the student's development as reader, writer, speaker, and listener. The students also provide a reflection on their own development to complete the interview. This information provides context for both students and teacher, and presents a starting point from which the students can analyze their progress over the semester.

Work Samples and Observations: Throughout the semester, students add work samples to their portfolios, which include class assignments, but can also include any other kind of evidence that the students feel contributes to representing their learning throughout the semester. Observations are regular, short accounts that log the students' evolving comprehension of what they encounter on a daily basis that relates to their learning in the class. These observations can relate to classwork, personal experience, or anything that the students find important to their development in the class.

Analysis of Evidence (Part B): Students present an analysis of their work according to two sets of criteria: the learning objectives of the course that are set by the instructor, and the "Dimensions of Learning." Fashioned from Vygotsky's learning theories, the dimensions of learning are: knowledge and understanding, confidence and independence, skills and strategies, the use of

prior and emerging experience, and reflectiveness. Recently Syverson and her collaborator Mary Barr added a sixth dimension: creativity, originality, and imagination.[11] Students complete Part B of the Learning Record twice, once at the midterm, and once at the end of the semester. The midterm assessment is a practice run, an opportunity for students to practice evaluating their own learning.

Evaluation (Part C): When the students have gathered and interpreted the evidence in Part B, they assess their work according to specific grading criteria established by the instructor, and provide a grade estimate. The instructor reads the entire portfolio, and responds to the grades the students have proposed according to the evidence and evaluation presented, determining the appropriate final grade based on the evidence.

The value of the Learning Record within the overall structure of a participatory engagement setting cannot be overstated. Because of the emergent, messy, and often collaborative work that students must undertake, traditional assessment systems such as tests and academic essays are insufficient means of evaluating a student's entire learning experience. The Learning Record structure responds to this issue by focusing on the evidence a student presents and how they analyze what they have learned from that evidence. As Syverson explains in "Social Justice and Evidence-Based Assessment with the Learning Record":

> *The only "rule" for using the Learning Record is that teachers must focus their observations and interpretations on what students demonstrate they know and can do, rather than reporting their assumptions about the students' deficits. The rule comes from an obvious fact of observation: we cannot observe what isn't there, only what is there. When we talk about what students don't know or can't do, we are speculating, not observing. The Learning Record model is based on students' development, not their presumed deficits. This simple rule has had the effect of qualitatively and globally changing the ecology of instruction and evaluation in ways that support student learning. (8)*

As the rich variety of documents in Eva's portfolio shows, the Learning Record's utility for a participatory engagement network is in the way it values diverse types of evidence, from fragmentary observations of the self to the documentation of collaborative effort. And the system's evidence-based structure provides a safety net so that students can take creative risks in their learning, regardless of the success of the final outcome of the project.

The Learning Record succeeds in bridging the multiple scales that structure an engaged participatory network. It provides a space where more traditional classroom-based academic learning can be understood in the context of messy

field work (and vice versa). Another of the Learning Record's assets is its ability to make student learning legible, even to readers not involved in the class itself. As Syverson explains,

Because the organization of Learning Records and the analytical framework of the Dimensions of Learning are consistent across all types of classes and all grade levels, evidence of learning can be apprehended and established even by readers unfamiliar with the subject or the coursework. ("Social Justice," 14)

The clarity of the Learning Record structure has exciting possibilities for interdisciplinary engaged projects. It gives researchers from different disciplines the tools to read student work from other classes and incorporate that data into their research. Just as importantly, the Learning Record structure makes it possible (although there are ethics involved here, of course) for parents and community members to read student work. As of yet, we have not held public displays of the university students' work for Mart residents. But the Learning Record does offer the possibility for civic engagement courses to make available (and public) the work of the students that comprise such an important component of university/community partnerships.

3. Create fluid movement between online and offline design spaces, both in the University and out in the community.

Traditional service learning tends to view the off-campus field site as the only space where engagement occurs. The classroom, on the other hand, is typically regarded as the space where students discuss readings, and share and interpret their off-campus experiences. In a participatory engagement network, it is worth thinking about the malleability and potential of these spaces rather than regarding them just as discrete containers with particular functions. In the WFNP and CDGD classes, for example, the classroom often operated more as a design lab rather than a site of instruction, and for very practical reasons. The scheduled class time was often the only time during the week when teams of students could actually gather in person to discuss their projects. The more regular work of the class, such as discussion of scheduled readings, often had to be rigorously planned and insisted upon by the instructors for it to happen at all, particularly later in the semester as project teams scrambled desperately to finish their projects. Counterintuitively, the online spaces of the blogs and wikis often shouldered the burden of regular classroom work, because students in both classes were asked to respond to readings (and one another) prior to class.

The media blitz in November 2010 serves to illustrate how media can create a fluid relationship between the classroom and off-campus sites. On a Saturday in November students of both

classes were invited to go to Mart to shoot informal oral histories using Flip cameras and take still images that could provide visual perspectives on Mart. Thirteen students volunteered to participate (six from the CDGD class and seven from WFNP). These students had the opportunity to get to know each other and Mart through informal media production. Later that month, I taught both classes how to create Google Maps, and members of every project participated remotely over the final weeks of the semester to build a collaborative map that represented the work of the entire semester. Simple media techniques provided a space where both classes could work together, produce and share perspectives on Mart, and create representations of the breadth of work that occurred over that short three month period. Institutional space and time, online platforms such as wikis, and the research site of Mart itself became a continuum of spaces and opportunity that facilitated an engaged response.

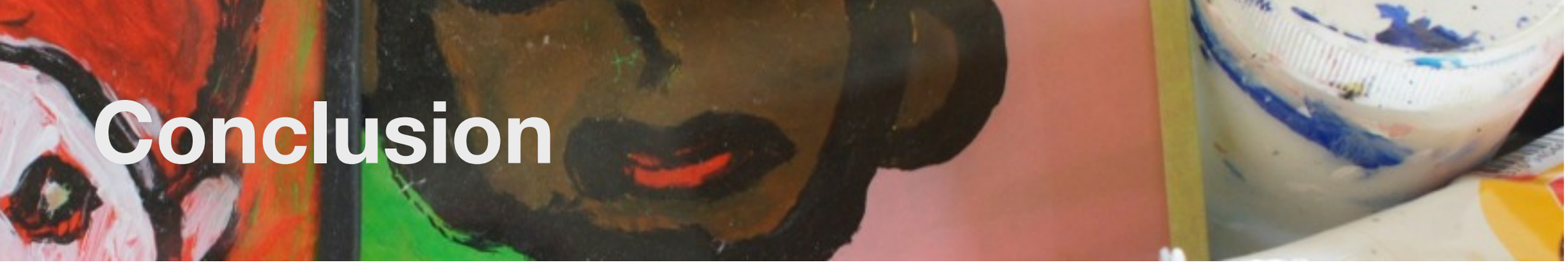
4. Use participatory online spaces and standard service learning documentation to anchor and expand the scope of the engagement.

Wikis serve an important purpose beyond student collaboration in a participatory engagement network. They also function as an archive of the emerging shape of the project. The MCP is not the product of a pre-determined design — as a kind of participatory culture, it is defined by the participation that informs it at any given time, and the way that participation builds on previous work. The wikis that the CDGD classes built over the fall and spring were also a way to capture institutional memory, as these wikis preserve drafts of all of our grant applications, student projects and Learning Records, copies of academic articles, and multimedia texts. The wikis also house evidence of the in-process work of the projects, such as meeting notes, copies of emails, and research on similar projects. The comment function built into each wiki page tracks ideas as they occurred to users, and every edit on a wiki page can be viewed via the revision history function built into the wiki architecture. The wiki is therefore a vital tool as it provides the most accurate map of the project, and enables students and instructors to reflect on their own trajectories and progress along the way.

The class wikis are an important means of documenting the emergent properties of the project, but other forms of documentation are also necessary to make the MCP's participatory engagement network coherent. Institutional Review

Board documents are a significant, if unlikely form of documentation in a participatory engagement structure. I find that the IRB has a particularly useful function here. By formally defining the scope of the research project, these documents can act as an institutional anchor that helps to make the project decipherable to the university administration and operates as a guide to researchers and instructors on the project.

Furthermore, having IRB approval can attract researchers to join the participatory network, because a completed IRB means that a significant amount of difficult footwork has already been accomplished. It also reassures them that the project will be guided by formal ethical standards for human research, protecting participants appropriately. The Mart Community Project has two active IRBs directed toward service learning and community engagement, and has been amended several times to add researchers from a number of disciplines who wish to participate in and research the project.[12] The growing number of researchers attached to the project contributes to its sustainability and diversity, and the IRB structure provides an opportunity to revisit and revise its mission on a regular basis.



Conclusion

The four recommendations that I offer here structure the UT/MCP participatory engagement network. They interconnect, and they operate at a variety of scales; for example, it is difficult to distinguish the utility of the class wiki from the Learning Record, which itself is instrumental to facilitating the relationship-driven structure of the network. However, I suggest that any of these recommendations could be tailored toward any civic engagement partnership, even if the approach is vastly different from the emergent network structure I've described above.

Briefly, it is worth considering some of the challenges that the MCP network experienced, as these issues that we have encountered are likely to be present for anyone who takes up some or all of our methodology. Because of the network's emergent properties, the instructors involved need to do a lot of work behind the scenes to keep information flowing smoothly. Since students are allowed to design their own projects, instructors need to pay particular attention to how well it meets the needs of the network as a whole. This requires regular check-ins on student progress and an open channel of communication with the off-campus partner to ensure that the emerging relationship is beneficial to all parties and ethically grounded. If there are two classes collaborating during the same semester, then coordination with the other instructor is vital — and time consuming. Of course, this kind of work largely goes unacknowledged in tenure files, and as such gestures to the well-documented problem of the labor-intensive qualities of civic engagement teaching and research. Finally, the individual students' needs and expectations must be taken into consideration. The experimental qualities of being in a class informed by a participatory engagement network will be different from their other goal-driven classes. Even with support systems such as the Learning Record to facilitate the learning that takes place, instructors need to be considerate of how time-intensive and difficult engaged learning can be for students, particularly considering their already-packed schedules.

These caveats aside, a participatory engagement network presents many benefits. The application of standard academic learning to civic engagement partnerships in the service of addressing complex social problems can provide a rich learning experience for students. At the institutional level, the

participatory engagement network is a flexible, sustainable structure that sits within institutional boundaries but moves fluidly between them, gathering momentum from its own affinity structure. The network is scalable; it can start out small, with perhaps one instructor incorporating projects and partnerships into one or more of his or her classes over a couple of semesters. As the relationships and reciprocity grows, so too can the intensity with which the institution commits resources to it. That is, the success of the network is defined by the strength of the relations that constitute it rather than an exterior problem that defines it.

This participatory network provides many benefits to the off-campus partners once they are persuaded to accept its emergent properties. Fostering sustained relationships builds trust, which in my experience is the hardest thing to earn in civic engagement. By not defining or attempting to solve a given problem, these long-term relationships create their own momentum. Off-campus partners see that the University is invested in them, and that they won't disappear at the end of the semester or immediately after a planned event. As both instructors and off-campus partners become more familiar with the pattern of collaborative activity over time, they are more likely to invest in this network. Students tell their friends about their experiences, and sign up for more classes themselves, or even sign on as research partners. Instructors too keep coming back for more; though exhausting, the work is addictive and invigorating and becomes easier once the foundations have been laid (for example, after a community contact has been made, or once one has figured out how to use the Learning Record). And the value of the network to the off-campus partner is immeasurable. As more and more projects are proposed and carried out and dialogues around them builds, local residents are able to catch glimpses of the connections between dimensions of the wicked problem, and they start to understand and explore how they can be a part of the wicked response.

Endnotes

1. Participatory cultures" is a term that loosely applies to an emerging, cross-disciplinary field that has its origins in media theory and cultural studies. One recent strand of this field (which most serves the purposes of this chapter) explores how education can be restructured to reflect how people informally produce and consume knowledge using digital media.

2 Service Learning flag courses are service learning courses at UT that require at least four hours of placement with an off-campus organization, and that feature assignments that encourage students to reflect on their placement experience. For more information about UT service learning courses, see: http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/vslc/sl.php. According to the UT website, the Substantial Writing Component (SWC) is "a UT Basic Education requirement designed to involve students in writing-intensive coursework related to their majors. Courses taken in residence at UT Austin meet the requirement if they provide at least three 'writing activities' (i.e. papers, not essay exams) per semester for a total of at least 4000 words." For more information, see: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/admissions/ate/problems/swc.html>.

3. Like service learning, civic and community engagement are both slippery terms. The FAQ for Illinois State's "Focus Initiative" suggests:

> *Community engagement impacts a specific localized problem or issue; for example it may be within the campus, within the city or county or maybe even within the state. Civic engagement is social responsibility in a larger context, working on global or national problems or issues and instilling a life-long commitment to the resolution of those problems or similar issues.*

See: <http://focus.illinoisstate.edu/modules/what/faq.shtml>

4. See Kathleen Woodward's "The future of the humanities — in the present & in public." *Daedalus*. 2009. 138(1), pp. 110-123.

5. For further reading on institutional culture, see anthropologist Mary Douglas's classic *How Institutions Think* (1986). In it, she argues that the way we think about institutions has far-reaching implications for human agency and how knowledge is categorized. For a relational perspective on institutions, see

Manuel De Landa's *A New Philosophy for Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (2006). There are so many works that are critical of the university as an institution that Literary and Cultural Studies scholar Jeffrey J. Williams has recently heralded the birth of "critical university studies." For a succinct survey of two decades of such scholarship, see Williams' "Deconstructing Academe: The Birth of Critical University Studies": <http://www.edu-factory.org/wp/deconstructing-academe-the-birth-of-critical-university-studies/>. Williams observes that the university is abandoning its public mission for reasons such as pressure from the corporate sector, research over-specialization, and the impact of digital networks.

6. In humanities scholarship, Manuel Castell's work is influential because he demonstrates how networks outcompete institutions, corporations, and even the state. For a detailed overview of Castell's theories of networks, see the *The Rise of the Network Society* (2011). Yochai Benkler's *The Wealth of Networks* (2007) is an influential text that uses a cultural studies approach to network theory. See also Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker's provocative and even controversial *The Exploit* (2007), which takes a poststructuralist perspective and argues against a techno-deterministic understanding of networks.

7. Schäfer's *Bastard Culture!: How User Participation Transforms Cultural Production* (2011) is perhaps the most comprehensive history and analysis of participatory culture. Axel Bruns' *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond* (2008) provides a detailed overview of the history of prosumer culture in the context of social media. In *The Future of the Internet — And How to Stop It* (2008) Jonathan Zittrain explores the political and social implications of the decline of the worldwide web and rise of mobile appliances.

8. For a more detailed explanation of these principles and the forms of learning they facilitate, see Jenkins et al p. 3, pp. 22 - 55.

9. Gee introduced the concept of affinity in his landmark book, *What Video Games Have To Teach Us about Learning and Literacy* (2003), and he has returned to the concept in many publications over the last decade. Since 2007, he has modeled affinity as a form of learning, a group structure, and as a space. For an overview of these different approaches, see Chapter 8 of *Language and Learning in the Digital Age* (2011), co-authored by Elizabeth Hayes. For other approaches to participatory cultures, See Mizuko Ito et al.: *Hanging Out, Messing Around and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media* (2010).

10. Clearly, I'm not the first to string "participatory" and "engagement" together as an articulation. A simple Google search produces over five million hits, though the majority of these exist outside of academic or civic engagement discourse. My theory-in-progress of participatory engagement doesn't attempt to build on any of these diverse (and often, poorly-defined) uses of the term. In this section, I've started from scratch

on the definition, drawing largely on my own work at UT and with the MCP as evidence..

11. For a more complete explanation of the course strands and dimensions of learning, a detailed overview of the structure of the Learning Record, and a more complete overview of the history and development of the system, see the following research by Margaret Syverson: “Social Justice and Evidence-Based Assessment with the Learning Record” (2011); *The Learning Record Website* <http://www.learningrecord.org>; and *The Wealth of Reality* (1999), pp. 199-207.

12. The Digital Archives of Literacy Narratives (DALN) at Ohio State University is an excellent example of a civic-oriented media project that folds IRB approval into its very structure. The DALN is an accessible research site as well as an archive, as it asks participants who decide to contribute to fill out an IRB-approved form that grants access to researchers. The DALN therefore makes various kinds of documentation available that serve to promote further participation in the project and therefore contribute to its long-term sustainability.

13. Some of the footage from this video features prominently in the rough documentary short about the Chambless Field mural from Chapter 1 (which Eric helped edit).

14. For a recent overview of how critical spatial theory has been mobilized in rhetoric and composition, see Scott Barnett’s 2012 Kairos article, “Psychogeographies: Ma(r)king Space at the Limits of Representation.”

15. The Austin Clubhouse is a nonprofit that supports Austin residents with debilitating psychological and psychiatric conditions. For more information, see: <http://austinclubhouse.org/>.

16. “Pecha Kucha” was developed by architects to address the problem of badly designed and lengthy PowerPoint presentations. For more information about the “Pecha Kucha” presentation style, see: <http://www.pecha-kucha.org/>.

Chapter 3

Mapping the Problem as Wicked Response

Introduction

An undergraduate student named Eric from my "Writing for Nonprofits" class in the Fall of 2011 decided he wanted to make a short documentary about the Mart Community Project. At the beginning of the semester, Eric had set himself some very rigid guidelines for his project: he wanted this documentary about the MCP's output to *only* feature footage of Mart and its citizens, and he took extreme pains to edit out anyone else who wasn't a resident. As he worked, he grumbled that the Mart Community Project didn't seem to have "a point" — how was he supposed to tell a story about something that didn't make sense? But little by little, as the semester progressed, and after several visits to Mart, Eric's attitude relaxed. He began to figure out that Mart was more than the sum of its parts, and that the people that formed the MCP were affecting (and being affected by) the town. Eric's edits started to allow UT students and other members of the MCP screentime alongside Mart's inhabitants, and the story that Eric is now using media to tell is all about interconnectedness. Though once he had eyes only for the MCP's "product," he's now noticing all manner of relationships in and to Mart. And Eric's edits haven't stopped at all — like some of the other MCP-affiliated UT students, he continues to work on his project even though his class has long finished. As the MCP grows and morphs, so does Eric's documentary. In fact, we joke among ourselves that if he keeps along this path, his narrative about the relationships of Mart's citizens and the people that make up the MCP may become "the greatest story never told." This summer, Eric is returning to Mart to lead media workshops… and continuing to work on his film.[1]

In this chapter, I further explore how media production can respond to a given wicked problem by sharing and analyzing various examples of Mart-related media produced by UT students (often made in conjunction with Mart residents). Eschewing the usual perspective that media production is just about making representations of someone or something, I argue that media production — particularly for those practicing the participatory engagement that I detailed in chapter 2 — is best addressed as the creation of new literal and conceptual relationships between people and space. First, I briefly survey two of the rhetoric and composition field's dominant scholars' approaches to engaged media. I then go on to posit that media scholars who under-theorize engaged media (or refuse to

examine it at all) have problematically led us to think about physical spaces as being distinct from mediated spaces. I situate my own perspective as one that is aligned with those digital media scholars and critical geographers that assert that a space is constituted by a continuum of relations. In particular, I draw upon landscape architect and academic James Corner's work, which describes that rather than just being about representing what's there, mapping can ultimately be about realizing the possibilities of space. For the bulk of this chapter, I apply Corner's typology of maps and mapping to a range of media produced by MCP-affiliated classes from the Fall 2011 semester to pursue my claims about media's relational potentialities. I demonstrate how the mapping that Corner calls "layering" allows students to generate research about a specific space in order to write *about* an off-campus partner. I then illustrate how what Corner calls "drift" mapping can present a more personal, psychological understanding of a specific space by writing *with* people about their relationships with their lived environments. I conclude this chapter by hypothesizing that Corner's remaining types of maps ("game-board" and "rhizome") might also be savvy ways of using media to renegotiate the relationships between people and space in order to artfully form a wicked response to a wicked problem.

Section 1

Mapping Theory

There are infinite places that one might begin a summary-discussion of the dense and convoluted ways that mapping has been theorized. Since that's the case, I choose to begin with two scholars in rhetoric and composition who I admire, and who have done powerful work with digital media in civic engagement. Jeffrey Grabill is primarily interested in the infrastructure that supports new media composition. In *Writing Community Change: Designing Technologies for Citizen Action* (2007), Grabill explores a collaboration between the Writing in Digital Environments Research Center at Michigan State and an off-campus community on a pressing environmental issue. They worked together to build the infrastructure and interface for a publicly accessible database that contained information about an environmental health issue in the area. Grabill argues that these kinds of "information structures that allow people to make things that matter to them and their communities" (3) are a vital contribution to the world, though rhetoric and composition studies sometimes overlooks this mode of scholarship and engagement.

Ellen Cushman also notes the importance of paying close attention to the structures of media composition in civic engagement projects. Cushman guided her service learning classes at the University of Michigan, Lansing, to produce a website and educational resources for the Cherokee Nation. Cushman argues that the Cherokee Nation website project is an instance of a "praxis of new media" that combines "critical, community, and digital literacies with the goal of producing transformative knowledge by and for all stakeholders" (Cushman 114). However, Cushman advises that the new media praxis reveals the many social, institutional, and physical networks that are often invisible in more traditional composition. A praxis of designing new media, she contends, needs to take into account the ethical and social ramifications of the process.

Despite quality work by the likes of Grabill and Cushman, the field of rhetoric and composition still suffers from a paucity of illustrations of the many ways that media informs civic engagement practices, and I believe this may have to do with how we understand the relationship between media and space. For example, Elenore Long's *Community Literacy and the*

Rhetoric of Local Publics (2008) is an excellent overview of civic engagement within the discipline, but unwittingly demonstrates the limits of how we think about media in civic engagement. In a section of the introduction to the monograph called "What this book doesn't do," Long writes that she doesn't "address blogs, virtual urbanism, crowd sourcing, or citizen media" (12). The focus of the book, Long explains, is on "local publics that are at once physical and discursive — places where people go face to face and soul to soul" (12). To make her claim, Long quotes Nancy Welch's "Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Post-Publicity Era" (2005). That quote is worth reproducing here because it goes to the heart of what I consider to be a common misunderstanding of the function and potential of media and its relationship to physical space. Welch writes,

> *Virtual reality is not a sufficient counter to or substitute for increasingly privatized and regulated geographic space. While it's true that information technologies and the virtual communities they create played organizing roles in such historic events as the student take-over of Tianenmen Square and the globalized demonstrations against a second Gulf War, it was the physical taking of Tianenmen Square that made possible its transformation into a space representing democracy (Miller 148). And it was to prevent such a material transformation that New York City cops herded thousands of frustrated protestors into pens on February 15, 2003, far from the rally they'd travelled miles to attend. (487-88)*

Of course, it is hard not to have sympathy for Welch's spot-on observation that public spaces are becoming increasingly privatized and regulated. The problem lies with Welch's analysis (and Long's endorsement) of how media functions. They regulate it to the role of the virtual, which can only ever be a supplement to "real" space; media is merely a tool through which to foment material action.

The annexation of the virtual in civic discourse may seem a little out-dated or improbable in the context of the Occupy Wall Street and "Arab Spring" social justice movements, which so heavily rely on social media. However, Long's mode of separating the physical and digital in civic discourse actually still persists in relation to those movements. In 2010, columnist and technology commentator Malcolm Gladwell wrote a provocative piece in *The New Yorker* called "Small Change." In that article he argues that digital social networks are not equipped to deliver "real" social activism precisely because they are based on a limited form of engagement that does not equate with "high risk" activism (where people put their lives in danger for a cause). He uses Martin Luther King to illustrate his argument:

> *If Martin Luther King Jr. had tried to do a wiki boycott in Montgomery, he would have been steamrollered by the white power structure. And what use would a digital*

> *communication tool be in a town where ninety-eight per cent of the black community could be reached every Sunday morning at church? The things that King needed in Birmingham — discipline and strategy—were things that online social media cannot provide. (np)*

Gladwell's polemic echoes Long's concerns about the role of media in activism. Media is relegated to an organizing tool that is only ever supplementary to physical occupation of contested, "real world" public spaces.

Of course, I'm not attempting to argue that digital and physical spaces should be considered equally, regardless of context. Rather, I'm using the annexation of media evident in Long and Gladwell's arguments to illustrate a common misunderstanding of the relationship between physical and mediated spaces. By privileging the real over the virtual and human agency over complexity, this approach elides the intricate relations (including interrelations between the real and the virtual) that structure any event (such as a demonstration in Zuccotti Park, or the MCP-affiliated classes' media blitz in Mart).

Theorizing space as a system of fluid relations has been explored over decades and across disciplines. Critical geographer Jonathan Murdoch notes how post-structuralist theory complements and informs a relational understanding of space:

> *Any interaction between a people and a 'thing' must also be seen as a relation between the people and the 'thing.' As post-structuralists and geographers begin to look closely at spatially-situated interactions so they begin to recognize that there are many differing kinds of relations running through and around given spatial locations. (2)*

Thus, according to Murdoch, a relational understanding of space shouldn't be conceptualized as a (literal or symbolic) container with distinct edges and boundaries; instead, relational space is best envisioned as a web of multiple heterogeneous relations comprised of fluctuating entities and processes. Critical geographer David Harvey adds the element of time to this tricky equation. In *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference*, he describes that what we observe as a discrete space — that is, one that appears to have a particular shape and function, such as a football field or a university — is a "kind of spatial permanence" (261). Space as we understand it is carved out of these permanences, but their solidity is misleading: "they are not eternal … They are contingent on the processes that create, sustain, and dissolve them" (261). In other words, spaces are stabilizations of processes that constantly break down and rebuild and make and remake the areas they inhabit.

And the processes that constitute space are themselves comprised of multiple relations. Geographer Doreen Massey suggests that space is "the product of the intricacies and

complexities, the intertwinings and the non-interlockings, of relations, from the unimaginably cosmic to the intimately tiny" (Massey 38). Determined by complex relations on manifold scales, the apparent solidity of space conceals infinite combinations and outcomes. However, just because space is laced with relational possibility does not mean that it necessarily functions that way. Jonathan Murdoch adopts a Foucauldian approach (as do many other scholars on the topic) to warn that "relations are inevitably double-edged: they can facilitate movement and access; equally they can entrench confinement and exclusion. Thus, spatial relations are also power relations" (22). Like any complex system, space is fundamentally open to influence and transformation, but the degree to which that openness can occur depends upon the power structures or permanences that dictate the circulation of relations and processes there.

A relational understanding of space is nothing new to rhetoric and composition scholars. Margaret Syverson and Nedra Reynolds, for example, draw on ecological and spatial theories to argue for the complex role that space plays in writing.[2] However, the field would benefit from more examples of multimodal writing methods that build on relational understanding of space. I wish to contribute to the field's understanding of writing and space by looking at mapping as a generative form of writing that is particularly suited to student-oriented civic engagement projects. To do so, I lean heavily on landscape architect and scholar James Corner's exploration of maps and mapping

James Corner runs his own landscape design company and he teaches at schools such as Columbia, Princeton, and the Royal Danish Academy. He has also edited the award-winning *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture* (1999). As an academic, he is well versed in "high theory" discourses of place and space, but as a professional designer out in "the real world," he also possesses a grounded understanding of space. In his excellent and inspirational "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique, and Invention," he writes,

> *Maps are in-between the virtual and the real […] More important is how the map permits a kind of excavation (downward) and extension (outward) to expose, reveal, and construct latent possibilities with a greater milieu. The map 'gathers' and shows things presently (and always) invisible, things which may appear incongruous or untimely but which may harbor enormous potential for the unfolding of alternative events. (225)*

The lived-in environment of Mart is littered with abandoned and decaying spaces, and its reinvention demands that we consider how to imaginatively transform them. In Chapter 1, I argued that the mosaic mural at Chambless Field creatively rewrites space to facilitate the difficult work of building and sustaining relations that

the social, cultural, and economic rejuvenation of the city requires.

Corner uses Deleuze and Guattari to show how a map is not meant to be an accurate representation of reality. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari gloss the difference between representation and production by marking the difference between a map and a tracing:

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency. […] The map has do with performance, whereas the tracing has to do with competence. (qtd. in Corner, 14)

The difference between the tracing and the map is crucial to Corner's theorization of what mapping is and does. A map is not an accurate representation of space, but rather, it is a performance of possibility. It is not a matter of accurate draughtsmanship in execution, it is an imaginative yet rigorous application of a variety of methods and approaches that are synthesized into a single cartographic plane to reveal what a space might become rather than just trace what it already is.

Corner advises that the process of mapping is determined by the interplay of two opposing forces. On the one hand, maps in some form or other are designed to be analogous to actual ground conditions — in this sense, they "represent" or relate to something. On the other, maps are inevitably an abstraction because of the way they select, omit, isolate, distance, and codify information (Corner 215). This doubleness that structures a map also means that "it is doubly projective: it both captures the projected elements off the ground and projects back a variety of effects through use" (215). To build such a "double projection," Corner isolates a three-stage process in map-making:

First, the cartographic field or plane must be designed, and the graphical notation system that will anchor the evidence needs to be chosen. Corner argues that, "Design and set-up of the field is one of the most creative acts in mapping. A field that breaks with convention is more likely to precipitate new findings, is going to be more inclusive, and as non-hierarchical as possible is going to bring best results" (230).

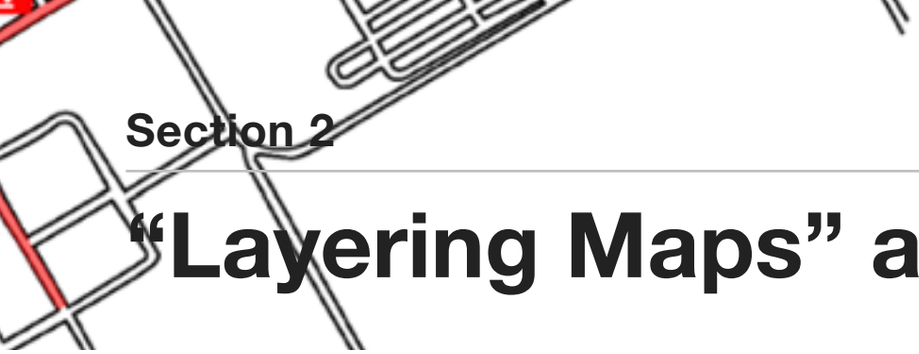
Second, the extracts, or the elements that must be observed in the mapping milieu must be plotted and drawn on the graphic field. (230)

Finally, "plotting" entails the "drawing out" of the various relationships among the evidence, or extracts on the map (230).

To summarize, mapping involves three, necessary operations: the creation of a field and a system of rules that establishes the system; the extraction of data; and the plotting of relationships. Corner isolates four types of maps and mapping methods: layering, drift, game-board, and rhizome. Layering and drift maps have been particularly important to projects undertaken by MCP-affiliated classes, and it is to those types of maps and classes that I turn to for the remainder of this chapter.

My personal experience would seem to confirm that mapping is about producing new perspectives and realities; mapping has literally mapped my career. When I started to teach freshman composition courses in the Digital Writing and Research Lab in the Department of Rhetoric and Writing at UT, I attended a workshop by former graduate student Jim Brown, who taught about using Google Maps as a writing tool. Excited by the idea, I started to inflict Google Maps assignments on students in all my classes, often trying out new approaches each semester. I asked students to use maps as an invention exercise, to create drafts of papers as maps, and even to remix traditional essays into map form. I began to notice how otherwise novice writers were enthused about building maps, and even excited to share their creations with one another and online. Their excitement got me thinking how simple online tools such as Google Maps could break down the walls between what we were learning in class and the world beyond. I showed Dr. Batt's WFNP students how to use Google Maps in 2008, an exchange which has led to an enduring, creative relationship with Dr. Batt as well as a deep personal commitment to teaching WFNP, both of which have in turn nudged my own classroom and research endeavors toward civic engagement.

I used my Google Maps experiments as my calling card as I chased down further opportunities to do engaged research. (Later, as I went on the job market, I similarly attempted to impress with my ideas about mapping and pedagogy). When I first met Paula at the *Imagining America* conference in 2009, I told her about my mapping adventures, and she immediately asked me to join the MCP. In the happenstance fashion that seems to be the MCP's trademark, Peter Hall, then a senior lecturer in the Department of Art at UT, soon became attached to the project as well through his friendship with Lynn Osgood. Hall is co-author and editor of *Else/Where: Mapping — New Cartographies of Networks and Territories*, and it was during his research for that book that he became acquainted with James Corner. Corner's ideas, and the classwork they inspired Peter Hall's students to create, have further energized my interest in cartography and civic engagement practices. As best I can tell, the common expression "and the rest is history" doesn't quite ring true for the MCP's story, this dissertation, or the next stage of my career. The rest is *mapping*.



Section 2

“Layering Maps” and “Writing About”

Corner explains that a layering map “involves superimposing various independent layers one upon the other to produce a heterogeneous and “thickened” surface (Corner 235). The “thickened” surface of the layering map consists of various types of information that overlay each other, often discordantly. Corner offers a gymnasium floor as an example of a layer map: lines of different colors intersect each other across the floor, demarcating playing spaces for different games. Each set of lines has its own internal logic that orders the activity and use of space in the gymnasium in a particular way, but observed as a totality, they represent an amalgam, or thickened perspective on the overall function of the gymnasium as a whole. Corner argues that the richness of the layering map cannot be achieved in a text such as a master planning document. The clear and sequenced order of a plan cannot represent the rich complexity of layers that the layering map reveals (235). Layering maps are therefore future-oriented by design, as the interaction between the various layers of information plot the possibilities inherent in the space.

In the context of civic engagement projects, it is worth considering layering maps alongside what Thomas Deans theorizes as “writing about” (Deans 2000, 108). In writing about community, students respond to the complex social issues they encounter through their experience with the off-campus partner. Although the source material may be different to the typical academic essay, Deans suggests that students “express their reflection, analysis, or critique in familiar academic discourses (the journal, the reflective essay, the research paper)” (Deans 2000, 110). A layering map, I suggest, presents a mode of writing about, as the complex layering of information presents students with the opportunity of detailing intricacies that resist being shut down by linear narrative. Because of their structure, however, I would suggest that in some cases layering maps can also enact Deans’ “writing for” community. To illustrate, I use four different texts from two classes associated with the MCP.

Peter Hall taught “The Art of Mapping” during the Fall of 2011 while he was a senior lecturer in the Department of Art and Art History. (He is now the Design Convenor at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia). Along with Janet Abrams, Hall is co-author and editor of *Else/Where: Mapping — New Cartographies of Networks and Territories*. His design theory class extolled the

tremendous potential of maps to present diverse perspectives. In conjunction with the MCP, the students of the design theory class developed an impressive array of layering (and drift) maps by combining research and site visits.

During their first field trip to Mart in September 2011, the design theory students were given the task of simply wandering around town and taking photographs of whatever caught their eyes, such that they could later use the photographs as data for layer maps. Raquel Breternitz, Lauren Griffin, and Karen Soriano were struck by the idiosyncratic typography of the signs on many of the buildings and decided to build a map around the theme of signage. They describe their mission in their final portfolio:

> *Our aim was to locate and record examples of interesting signage and typography in Mart and their varying conditions, with emphasis on lettering with a hand-made, authentic feel. Our hope is that the residents of Mart will recognize the significance that signage and typography has on the outward appearance of the town as well as its potential to reflect Mart's rich history. (np)*

As Corner states, any map consists of a cartographic field, the data to fill that field, and the "plottings" (or themes) that the map attempts to represent. The students had over thirty different signs they wished to use, so they chose two different types of media to represent their findings: poster-sized paper and a self-published book.

For the data (the "plottings") they traced Mart's street grid from Google Maps using Adobe Illustrator, and added the location of the signs on the grid with numbered markers. The numbers on the street grid link to "speech bubble" shapes at the bottom of the page that contain an abstract graphical representations of a number of the most interesting signs.

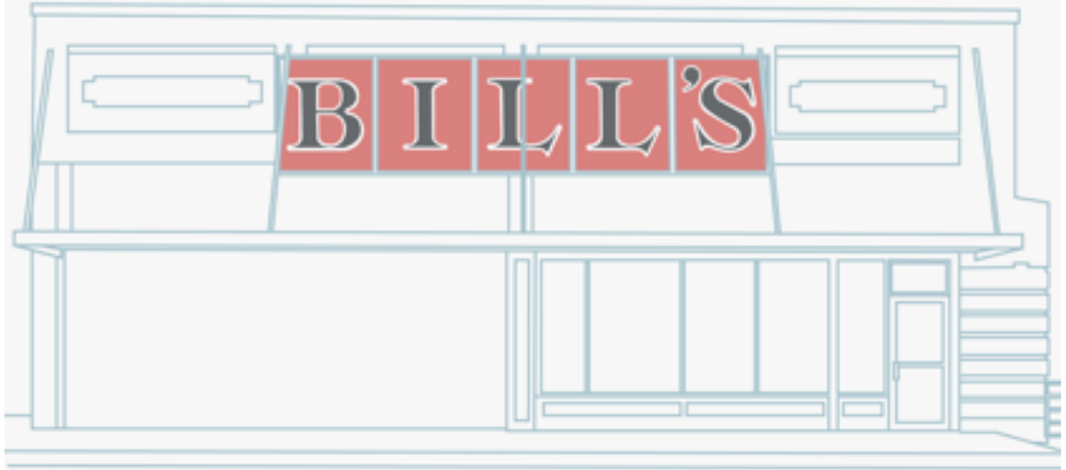
Image 4.1 “Welcome to Mart”

Image: Raquel Breternitz, Lauren Griffin and Karen Soriano

The arrangement of the poster invites the viewer to move between the spatial plane of the geographical grid to the abstracted signs below, presenting a visual reading of the town according to the different signs and their location. The lettering of “Mart” in the title uses the same hand-painted typography as one of the signs, presenting a further layer of information to the map. It demonstrates the students’ intention to show how signage is part of the town’s historical identity and cultural history, and they imply that it could be used to help describe an identity for its future.

For the book design, they expanded the scope of the map by presenting the photograph of the sign and its abstracted image on facing pages of the book. Although not visible in the slideshow below, each page of the book also contains a miniature grid map of the town with a small red dot denoting the building’s location.

Gallery 4.1 Signs of Mart



Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipisicing elit, sed do tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.

Because it presents the signs in both photographic and abstracted form, the book version presents a more situated reading of the sign and its context. The traced image foregrounds the sign, whereas the photograph makes it easier to see the sign's relationship to the building. For example, contrast the "Dairy Cream" sign to the hand-painted Mart sign that the students foreground in the poster version of the map. The former dominates the entire building, while the latter, which is far more interesting in terms of typography, is small and easily missed.

By paying attention to a particular object and its relation to the surrounding space, the signage maps highlight historical and cultural perspectives that often go unnoticed during everyday life. This map had a particularly lasting impact, as the the hand-painted sign of Mart was eventually adopted for the banner of the MCP website redesign. The map therefore lives up Corner's understanding of layer maps as "future oriented," as it served to give the MCP an identity that is both rooted in Mart and reflects the ongoing interactions between Mart and the UT/MCP network.

After the students' initial site visit, Hall asked his students to do statistical research about Mart and to create another set of maps based on their findings. The students applied official census and county tax appraisal data to satellite imagery and Google street views to make visualizations of what they considered to be pertinent themes. James Barela created "Visualizing Basic Prose Literacy Skills," a map that deftly contextualizes literacy rates in the US, Texas, and more locally, in McLennan County, where Mart is located.

Image 4.2 “Visualizing Basic Prose Skills”

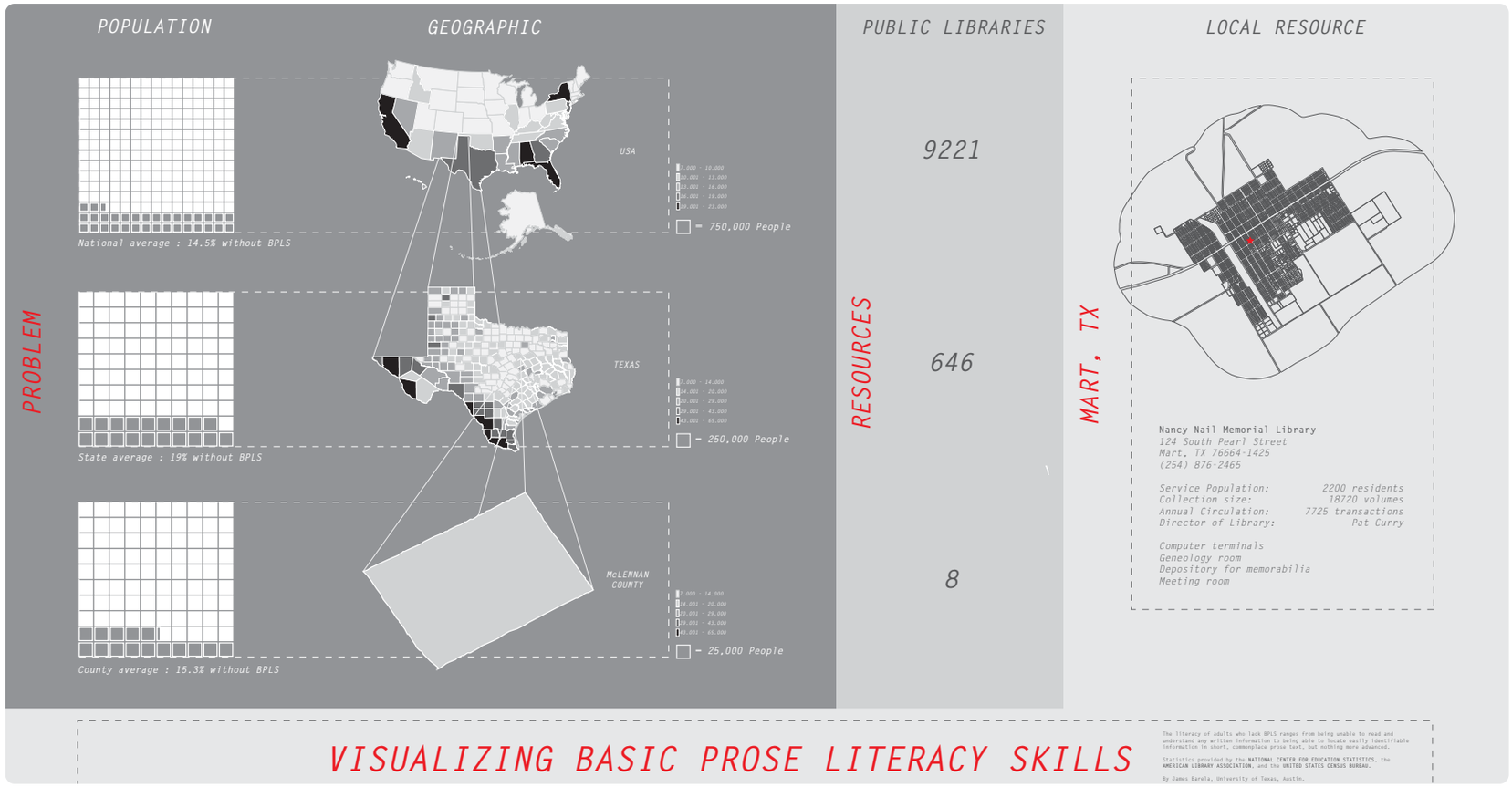


Image: James Barela

<Interactive Map: “Visualizing Basic Prose Skills”>

The map uses a variety of visual strategies (grids, geographical maps, and color-based legends) to place Mart within the context of national “basic prose and literacy skills” from National Center for Education Statistics data. Using multiple scales, the map combines literacy statistics at three geographical scales to make the visual argument that McLennan County has favorable literacy rates compared to the rest of the country. Barela chose to link the Nancy Nail Memorial Library to the area’s favorable literacy rates. As he argues in his portfolio,

The importance of the library as a public place to access information informed my interest in pursuing a map that documented literacy rates. The Nancy Nail Library in Mart is an integral part of the community. The enormous good the library contributes is based on what the library has to offer: a genealogy room, a depository for memorabilia, computer work stations for those who don’t have computers, a collection that is comparatively large for a town of this size (pop. 2500), and a commitment to present an accurate portrayal of the history of Mart. (np)

The map itself uncovers (perhaps surprising) relationships between literacy rates at the local, regional, and national levels. Many might expect an impoverished, rural town to be less literate than what Barela's map illustrates. It also suggests how a particular local space in Mart contributes to those impressive statistics, and by placing the library as central to this map that contains such vital data, Barela both advertises this community resource and argues for its importance to Mart's identity: Mart is a town that reads.

Image 4.3 Mart, Texas Food Insecurity Rate"

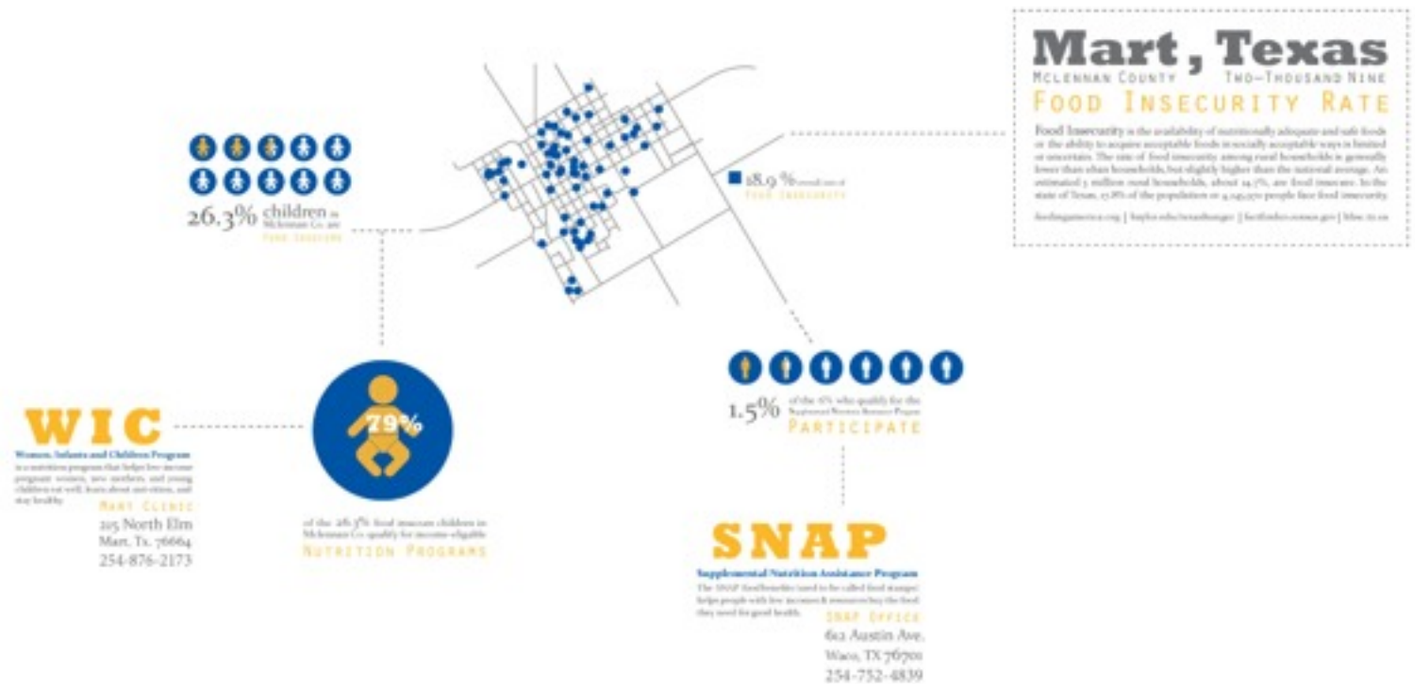


Image: Elisa Alvarado

The design theory class students also used national statistics to highlight urgent social problems. In "Food Security" Elisa Alvarado used the most recent census data to highlight how nearly 20% of Mart residents are unable to consistently feed their families, and that only 1.5% of the community receives nutritional assistance, though many more are eligible. Alvarado presents an outline of Mart's streets, and uses color-coding, easily-identifiable symbols (human figures), and short paragraphs of text that foreground the problems and possible solutions to it.

Alvarado eloquently describes her motivation to tackle the issue of food in her final portfolio:

> *Like many people living in rural America, 18.9% of Mart's residents are unable to consistently access enough food to adequately feed their families (www.feedingamerica.org). However, according to the 2009 census, only 1.5% of the Mart community receives government nutritional assistance.[3] Research has shown*

> *that people do not actively seek government assistance for one of two reasons: lack of education and pride. My map was generated to inform the citizens of Mart about the government assistance programs available to them without pointing fingers or placing blame.Within the United States, an estimated 3 million rural households, about 14.7%, are food insecure [sic]. Food Insecurity is when the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain. (np)*

This explanation points to the strength of layering maps as diagnostic tool, one of the most hopeful aspects of mapping this form of ”writing about” in civic engagement partnerships (though note that Alvarado also slips into “writing for” in her rationale). She diagnoses that people do not seek help because of pride, and the map is carefully designed to inform without judgment. This is achieved through the spatial organization of the map itself: the map invites the viewer to deduce the relationship between the data, which is far more difficult to do in narrative form.

Corner suggests that maps are future-oriented, but that does not mean that past events cannot also be plotted on a layering map. On the contrary, understanding the historical relations that structure space can often be the key to opening up its future possibilities. Layering maps are not constrained by time or any other kind of data they represent, and can instead present multiple, even discordant layers on the map surface. During their site visits, the design theory students met Jeannie Smith, the owner of a small property on the outskirts of town. Five years ago, Jeannie and her husband bought an overgrown plot of land two miles west of Mart, and during the long process of clearing the land, they came upon an overgrown graveyard of the African-American Wise family and their relatives. Many of the gravestones were broken, or weathered beyond legibility.

Gallery 4.2 Broken glass around the gravestone

Image: Sean McCarthy

As Jeannie and her husband cleared the yard, they noticed an abundance of bottles strewn about the graves. Jeannie researched this puzzling phenomenon, to find out that glass objects were often placed at African American graves as a symbolic representation of the passing from one life to the next.

From this information, a group of UT students (Elisa

Gallery 4.3 "The Wise Cemetery Map"

Image: Elisa Alvarodo, James Barela, and Sriritana Sutasirisap

Alvarodo, James Barela, and Sriritana Sutasirisap) photographed eleven of the bottles they found, and researched their age by examining their tops, the clarity of the glass, and markings. They then created this map that displays the relationship between the production history of the bottles and the lives of the people buried in the graveyard. They explain in their portfolio:

> *We photographed the bottles and placed them in ascending order over an outline of the cemetery. The size of the bottle images were then altered proportionally to reflect the time the bottle was produced with the largest bottle representing the largest period of production. The names of people buried there were placed below the bottle mapping, with timelines placed on either side to visually compare the lifespan of each person to the lifespan of the bottles' production. (np)*

On the map, the timeline separates the bottles' history from the lives of those resting in the graveyard. The map is both beautiful and unsettling; the objects dominate the cartographic space, whereas the viewer must peer closely to see the names of the dead.

The students who created the map acknowledged that arriving at the concept that could join the graves and bottles in a map was daunting. As they explain in their portfolio, "Initially, the idea of mapping unmarked graves with unmarked bottles seemed impossible. However, working with the information known about the graves and uncovering information about the bottles allowed us as designers to give a voice to the buried past" (np). By

layering these disparate elements onto a single plane, the students succeeded in creating a map that is both evocative and critical. The presence of the bottles illustrates a tradition of mourning, opening up a reading that suggests loss and grief. Yet, the domination of the objects over the lives of the dead also invites another reading. As the timelines show, some of the dead were likely born slaves, and many more were the progeny of former slaves. Like the bottles, the remains of those who lie in the Wise Family Cemetery had the experience of being treated little better than objects, mere tools in the line of production.

I look at an alternative approach to mapping the Wise cemetery in the next section, but it is worth highlighting here the impact the mapping project had on Mart. As news spread about the the mapping experiments at the Smith homestead, people began to tell Paula about local ghost stories that they thought might be connected with the graveyard. So many of these stories began to circulate that the MCP has planned a future oral history project based on ghost stories. Until that project is completed, it will be impossible to what degree the Wise cemetery has seeped into local folklore. However, the salient point here is that the very activity of the students mapping the space created new connections between Mart and its history, and presented the MCP with yet another exciting challenge.

As a collection, these maps have done important work to respond to Mart's future direction. In October of 2011, the MCP hosted the "Your Town" workshop sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts. Over three days, twenty-three Mart residents brainstormed ideas about the possible rejuvenation of Mart by attending talks by scholars and community development specialists and participating in design workshops. The agenda for the project, which was designed by Heidi Schmalbach and Lynn Osgood months before, originally didn't have mapping on its agenda. However the layer maps produced by the TAM class offered such splendid possibilities for idea generation that the workshop schedule was redesigned to facilitate a mapping workshop. Hall led the workshop, using the maps his students developed throughout the semester to encourage the workshop participants to create maps of their town and its future themselves. In this instance, the open-ended complexity that layering maps offer students in their "writing about" community also served as a beautiful opportunity for student research projects to function as a "writing for" the civic partnerships.

The final media text I wish to investigate in this section departs significantly in form from the above maps TAM, and even from Corner's idea of what constitutes a cartographic space. Although Corner urges his readers to think imaginatively about the possibilities of what can be produced in maps, the maps he theorizes are contained within a flat, two dimensional space (Corner 232). The students who developed the signage book found a means of departing from that model. In this final example of layer mapping, I invite a reading of the design of a different

kind of text — the redesign of the MCP website by students in a WFNP class that I taught during the Fall 2011 semester.

With Dr Batt's help, I created a version of the WFNP that collaborated with two off-campus partners: the MCP and the Austin Clubhouse.[3] My version of the course did include grant and proposal writing, but I shifted its focus to think about the ecology of written and multimedia texts that are so very necessary in nonprofit and civic engagement work. As a class text, I used *The Future of Nonprofits: Innovate and Thrive in the Digital Age* (2011) by nonprofit consultants David J. Neff and Randall C. Moss, which argues that nonprofit organizations' future sustainability depends on effectively incorporating social media tools into their communications strategies.

As the previous chapter explored, the 2010-2011 MCP-affiliated classes had led me to theorize service learning classes as a kind of participatory engagement network. In my WFNP class for the Fall 2011 semester, I attempted to put this theory into practice in a number of ways. I made research a collaborative event by structuring a short presentation into every class period during which students shared research on the communication strategies of a nonprofit organization of their choice. For this project, each student was required to conduct a well-researched rhetorical analysis. To keep their class presentations brief and focused, I employed the "Pecha Kucha" presentation style, which constrains presentations to twenty PowerPoint slides that are timed at twenty seconds per slide.[4] The exercise served to encourage students to bring multiple examples of nonprofit communication strategies into the class each day. Moreover, the strategy helped students to build strong relationships with each other, the instructor, and the knowledge they were building together, because they were tasked with being concise, polished, and persuasive. They became adept at quickly analyzing the many forms of communication nonprofits use, which led to skills and knowledge they put to good use in their final projects.

The final assignment was a group project with a deliberately open structure: the only rules of the assignment were that students had to work with both nonprofits and participate in more than one type of writing. For the Austin Clubhouse, students developed an animated version of their mission statement, suggested ways of developing their five year business plan, and implemented a series of "wellness" workshops that were accompanied by a website. For the MCP, students began work on the documentary short that I presented in chapter one (and that I referenced at the beginning of this chapter), designed a funding drive for the online peer-to-peer funding platform, and redesigned the MCP website. The students were so thrilled with their work that, unprompted, they produced the following short video clip to demonstrate their achievements and advocate for the WFNP class:

Movie 4.1 The WFNP class "movie trailer"

Video: WFNP class members.

Although not a pristinely finished product, this short video demonstrates how simple video production techniques can help students understand their participation in an engaged learning network. Students shot footage of themselves via phones and laptops, and then uploaded them to the class wiki. One student, Patrick, then quickly edited the piece together for the class presentation on the last day of class.

These assignments are both instrumental in understanding how the students arrived at the MCP website, and the layering map properties that came into its design. In September of 2011, Paula and Heidi Schmalbach (the writer of the successful NEA "Your Town" grant) gave a presentation to my WFNP class. After the presentation, a student commented that it was only after hearing Paula's personal account about the MCP that she felt that she understood the MCP. From the knowledge that the class was producing about nonprofit communication, she proceeded to provide a constructive but firm critique of how the MCP represented itself. She noted that the "About Us" page on the website contained none of the rich description that she heard in the presentation, and she then pointed to problems in the mission statement that are embarrassingly familiar to a teacher of writing, such as vague, declarative statements (here, about cultural and economic renewal in Mart) and an overuse of the passive voice that reflected a lack of confidence in what we at the MCP were saying. The student suggested that an explanation of the organic, emergent nature of the project — which is obviously so vital to understanding how and why the MCP functions as it does — was entirely absent from how the MCP was representing itself on the website.

These comments sparked a conversation over the coming weeks, and resulted in a group decision to take on the task of redesigning the MCP website for their final project. These students enthusiastically shifted from writing *about* the MCP to writing *for* it. Over three weeks in November they implemented a number of design and content changes that made the MCP website, and by extension, the MCP itself, far more coherent.

They chose a WordPress theme that had a front page that could accurately represent the purpose of the MCP, and they strategically organized content on the site by clarifying information and relationships. The students' process and the redesigned website very much reflected layer mapping; the students found a coherent spatial field with which to plot multiple orders of information.

Since they weren't experienced web designers, the process didn't emerge in the linear fashion of plotting the space, finding the data, and plotting the emerging themes that Corner describes. Instead, the design space and the content to be plotted emerged over time. Initially the team worked with Paula and I to fashion a more coherent mission statement and collect different narratives about the MCP that represented its diversity. Regarding design, the website team pulled from a number of sources, such as researching different WordPress themes that might suit the MCP's needs. The work of the other projects also played a big part in their design choices. For example,one team building a Kickstarter funding drive for a Chambless Field mural documentary found through their research that successfully funded campaigns require a pervasive social media presence to work. That is, regular use of several social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook is vital to the ethos of an organization that uses online peer-to-peer funding networks. Although the MCP has several social media outlets (we have a Flickr account for images, a YouTube account for videos, and a Facebook community page), students rightly noted that they required focus and more regular updates.

The WFNP class responded to this issue by working with me to choose a WordPress theme that had a front page that would accomplish a number of things: highlight the MCP's mission, present multiple representations of what we do, and promote our social media outlets.

Gallery 4.4 The MCP Home Page

The WP-Glide theme by Solostream that we selected for our new website has three boxes near the top of the front page that can accommodate text and media. The website team chose to use these boxes to spotlight the mission of the MCP and access to our social media sites. The middle box was reserved for video, which currently contains footage that is contained in the documentary short presented in chapter one.

With the design in place, the team then worked on organizing the content in a legible manner. Their first task was to arrange the content. They strategically organized the navigation bar in an effort to corral the chaotic, in-progress structure of the MCP into some kind of coherence.

Image 4.4 The MCP mission statement

The students managed to deliver a great final product by the end of the semester. As an artifact, the home page of the website very much functions like a layering map. Various kinds of data, such as the mission statement, social media streams, and key pages are easily accessible through the media boxes distributed throughout the page, and the narratives and written documents that tell the story are organized in a purposeful and coherent fashion. Each layer presents different perspectives on the project, but as a totality, the home page of the website does an excellent job of representing the MCP as a whole. It gives a sense of both a clear identity and reflects the emergent properties of the project.

By shifting from writing about to writing for the MCP, the team that undertook the redesign greatly contributed to the project. It gave us at the MCP what is perhaps our only “home.” Because the MCP functions more like a network that is distributed across time and space, it doesn’t have a bricks and mortar identity; the website redesign revealed how a coherent identity could be achieved for this kind of network. Furthermore, it provided us a valuable lesson in understanding relationships. Until the redesign, those of us running the MCP were so consumed with fostering new relationships in Mart and with UT classes that we had missed how important social media streams are to the project. The website forced us to look outward, and to understand how the project fits within a broader network of nonprofit and philanthropic work.

The research, design process, and the complex but open interpretation that layer mapping as a methodology gave MCP-affiliated classes the opportunity to manifest diverse relationships between people and space. Statistical research built a tapestry that situated Mart in a national perspective and eventually served to provide Mart residents ways of thinking about their town's rejuvenation during the important NEA workshop. A student's simple photograph of Mart signage was transformed through the relational process of layer mapping into a key design element for the MCP's civic engagement identity: the font and banner for our website, which is now our organization's signature, so to speak. The research and the product, the mapping and the maps are nothing less than the means of building the kinds of relations that are a persuasive response to a wicked problem.

Section 3

“Drift” Maps and “Writing With”

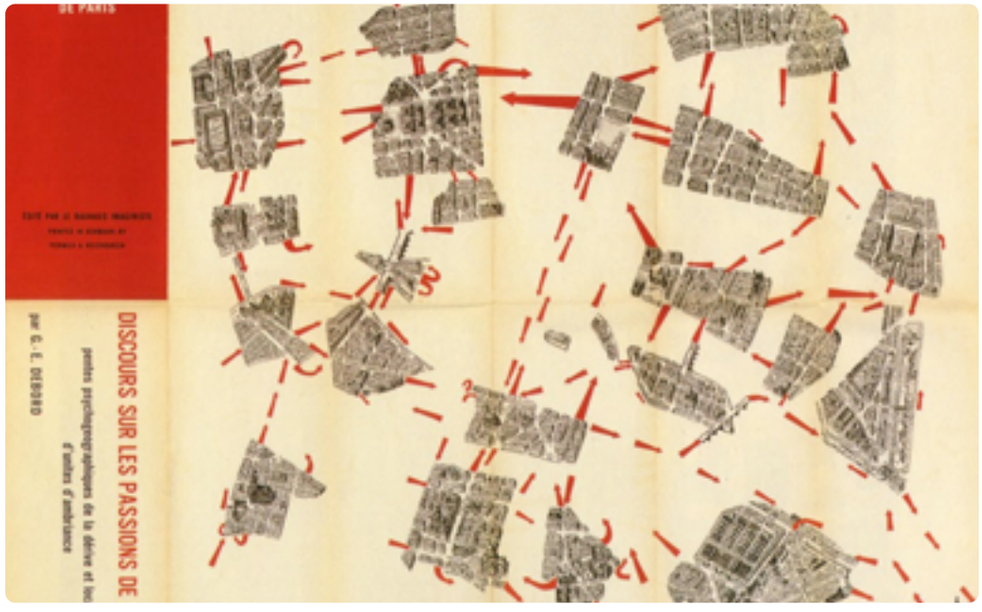
Layering maps have been successful in building relationships in Mart, particularly in their ability to connect multiple scales, from the street level to to the national. Their scope also suggests the limits of their potential: the more pedestrian, intimate details of everyday existence can slip through the many grids of information on a layering map. Routine can be the enemy of change; regularly passing through the same spaces on a daily basis can dull our perception of the potential of the places that we regularly frequent. Gaining a renewed understanding of those small and perhaps forgotten spaces — their history, how they are frequented and used, the unforeseen possibilities they may engender — is an important task to consider, and one that the layering map perhaps does not readily capture. A different methodology from layering is required, one that registers the pedestrian in the most generous sense of the word. What places do we walk to and through every day? What do we see and what do we miss? What do we seek out, and what do we avoid?

This more affective, personal view of space is captured by a mapping practice that Corner calls “drift.” As a method, it differs from layering in that it attempts to give form to on-the-ground-conditions rather than a birds-eye view from above. What is so very gripping about drift mapping, Corner suggests, “is the way in which the contingent, the ephemeral, the vague, fugitive eventfulness of spatial experience becomes foregrounded in place of the dominant, ocular gaze” (231-232). As the examples in this section will demonstrate, drift mapping lends itself well to collaboration. As such, it offers a way of thinking about “writing with,” the third term in Deans’ triad of approaches to civic engagement writing. Deans reminds us that compared to writing for and about, writing with eludes easy categorization, but includes such practices as activist research, literacy work, proposal writing, and activist research (Deans 110). Drift mapping may perhaps be best interpreted as activist research, in that it encourages local participants to form different relationships to their lived environment.

The methods of producing a layering map can often neatly correspond to Corner’s heuristic design process of first establishing the system, then extracting the data, and finally plotting the relationships (230). Drift mapping, in contrast, has its roots in conceptual art, and therefore requires a more

experimental approach. Corner borrows drift mapping in both name and concept from the French Marxist theorist, filmmaker, and avant garde artist, Guy Debord. In the 1960s, Debord turned his habit of wandering aimlessly around Paris into an artistic and politically motivated mapping process that he called the *dérive*. He would later cut up maps to represent his journeys, creating a highly subjective cartographic field that eschewed mimetic representation in favor of a collage of impressions and sensations that yielded a multidimensional representation of the city. This map created by Debord gives a clue to his method:

Image 4.5 Guy Debord and mapping



Source:
<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-Kq5UWhmt78k/Tg0ZLZdnneI/AAAAAAAAAJw/20LJ1T_js3Q/s1600/debord-guide1.jpg>

Fragments of a city map are distributed across the surface of the page. The network of city streets and buildings visible in the fragments contrast to their seemingly random placement on the cartographic plane. Some of the arrows that apparently connect these fragments curve back on themselves, or enter and exit a particular city space a number of times. The map presents a journey of twists and turns, dead ends, and incessant reorientations.

Image 4.6 "A Mart Narrative"

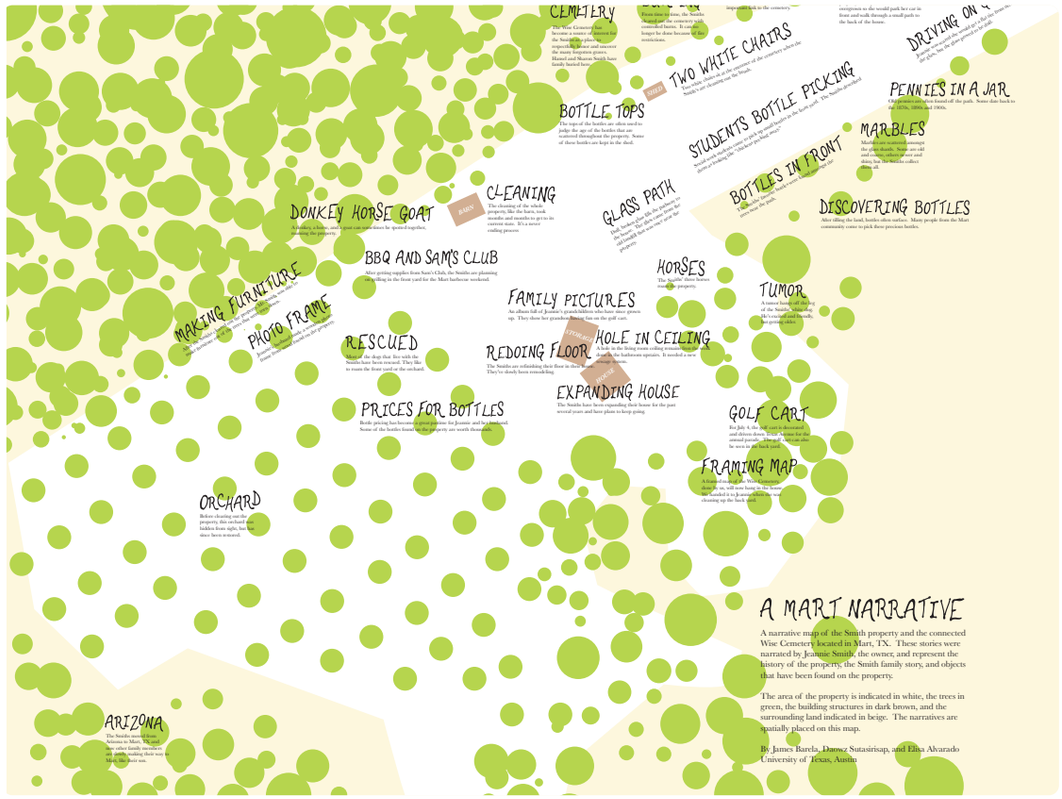


Image: Elisa Alvarado, James Barela, and Daowz Sutasirisap

Peter Hall asked his TAM students to create drift maps on their second field trip to Mart in October 2011. Now that students were more acquainted with Mart, the drift opened up opportunities to get to know the town's residents. "A Mart Narrative," produced by Elisa Alvarado, James Barela, and Sriritana Sutasirisap followed a *dérive* with Jeannie Smith, the owner of the property where the Wise Cemetery is located. In their final portfolio, the students describe the process: "An oral history of the forgotten Wise Cemetery and the Smith property located in Mart, TX was mapped according to a narration by owner Jeannie Smith. This personal account documents the Smith family story, the development and history of the property, and the many glass bottles and marbles that have been found on the site" (np). The following image shows their journey.

Like the example of Debord's map, "A Mart Narrative" doesn't have a linear structure, and the viewer is invited to wander across the surface of the map, which presents distillations of the oral history that Jeannie provided during the guided tour of her property. The descriptions condense Jeannie's narrative: we learn about objects on the property (bottles, chairs, a photo frame made by Jeannie's husband); the processes required to maintain it (cleaning, redoing the floor of the house); and the animals that live there. Small details give the reader a rich sense of the place. The viewer learns of the tumor that hangs off the leg of a rescued dog, for example.

There is no narrative flow to the map, and the viewer fills in the gaps by building an experiential understanding from the specific details that arise out of Jeannie's commentary and the students' representation of it. This example of a drift map opens up a number of possibilities for relationship building with off-campus partners. By combining an exploration of space with oral history techniques, the drift map presents a shared context between resident and visiting researcher/student that doesn't require formal training in oral history or interviewing. The space,

so to speak, does the talking; the resident's knowledge just conducts the flow of conversation. The student's task is to map that knowledge, and to present a form of "writing with" that is guided by space. This map — and the whole *dérive* experience — opens up possibilities for the resident to think differently (and perhaps more creatively) about their everyday lived environment. For the student (and the partnering organization, such as the MCP), the mapping process opens up a texture and richness of the research site that may be difficult to achieve by other means. The nascent, relational, and performative properties of space are revealed through the drift mapping, creating vantage points from which one might glimpse lost or repressed topographies, and perhaps presenting possibilities for reinventing space anew.

Some TAM students also performed drift mapping exercises with students from Mart High school, a partnership that uncovered different aspects of drift mapping and other visions of Mart. UT students Breternitz, Griffin, and Soriano again teamed up to interview Logan Evans, a student at Mart High School. In their final portfolio, they write:

> *Because we were interested in discovering and presenting a more personal perspective on Mart, TX, we interviewed a local high school student about his daily life. We converted the information we gathered into a spatial map of the main places he visits diurnally, supported by a schedule of a typical week in his life and a few interesting facts about each place. We also accompanied this infographic and map with a written bio to provide a clearer depiction of his personality. (np)*

In "A Week in Mart, TX, with Logan Evans," TAM students sought to capture how this young man's daily life falls into a weekly rhythm. Breternitz, Griffin, and Soriano chose a single cartographic field upon which they plotted a week in Logan's life by stitching together his daily activities in a calendar-style grid.

Image 4.7 “A week in Mart, TX With Logan Evans”

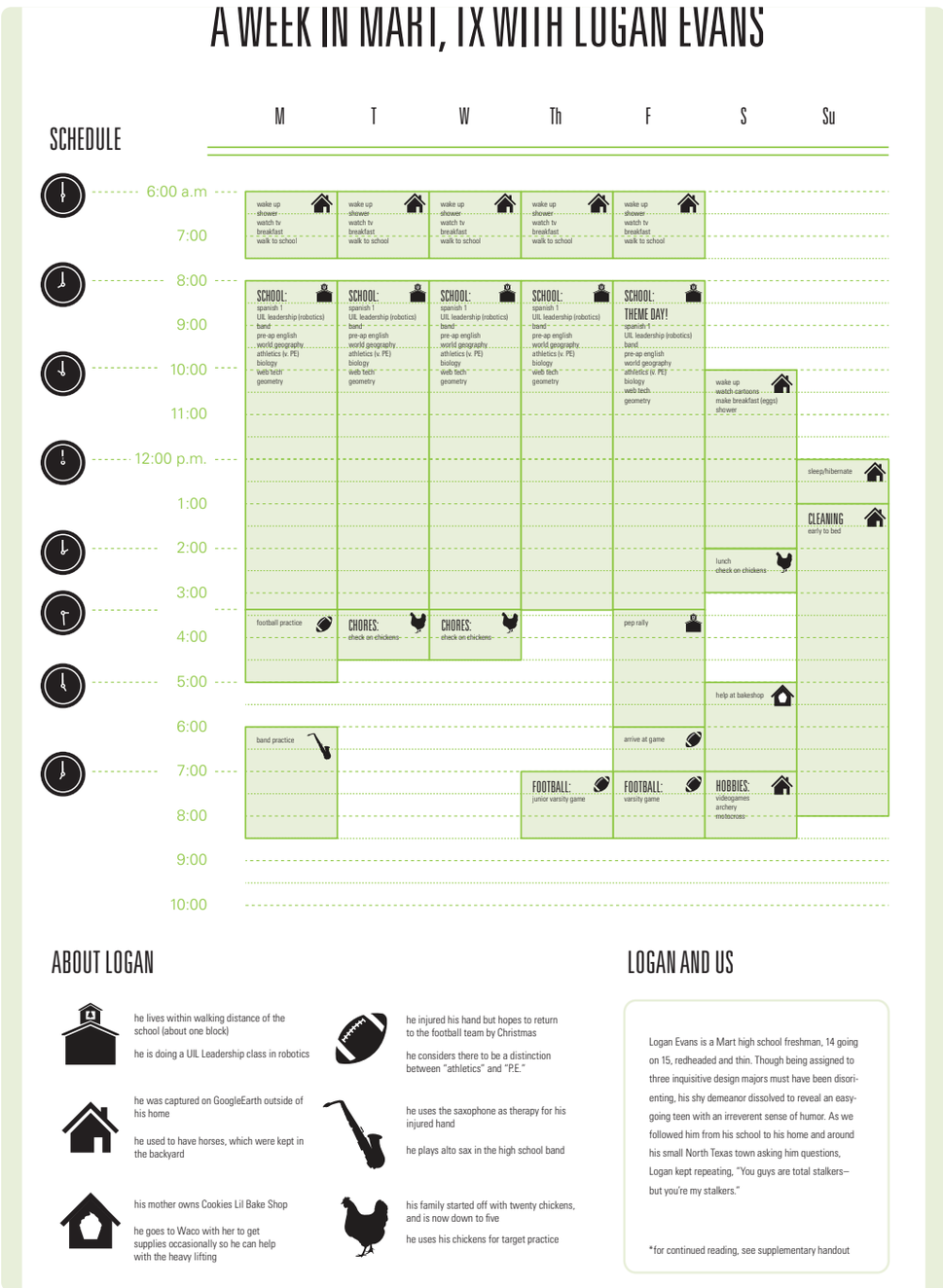


Image: Raquel Breternitz, Lauren Griffin, and Karen Soriano

The events on the grid are labeled with clear symbols that are explained in a key below the calendar. Those symbols are then overlaid on a tracing of Mart’s streets — a nod toward the way that time and space merge in Logan’s life. The *dérive* follows Logan from when he gets up to when he goes to bed. The calendar view gives the viewer a sense of how Logan’s days are carved up among institutional, familial, and personal time, the details of which can be accessed in the map’s legend. What is striking about this map is how temporally rigid Logan’s life is, suggesting how his engagement with his home and the various institutions and spaces in Mart are ordered by neat and regular chunks of time. The map might be productive as a way to link Logan’s daily routine to other hyper-scheduled twenty-first century youth. Although they couldn’t have known it at the time, Breternitz, Griffin, and Soriano selected for their map both a theme (that is, routines) and a guide (someone who is over-scheduled) that resulted in data at odds with Corner’s notion of “drift,” or that at light might be interpreted as revealing unexciting data. That’s not to say that the map wasn’t instructive on a number of fronts, but in terms of chance and discoveries and creative wanderings about Mart — well, it seems like Logan just didn’t have the time.

Gallery 4.5 “Mart *Dérive*”

THE YARD

“The house with all the crap behind it.”

“...this house with a lot of junk in the yard, right in front of the elementary school. There was a certain path you had to walk just to get to the door because they had so much junk in their yard – car doors, bikes.”

Image: Angie Calderon, Michael Jarrott, and Zac Norris

“Mart *Dérive*” presents a drift map of an amble around town, during which three TAM mappers recorded the perspectives of three high school students. Angie Calderon, Michael Jarrott, and Zac Norris describe the event in their final portfolio:

> *We documented our journey through photographs and the words of Mart High students … The students provided unique memories, perspectives, and observations in relation to the places that we encountered on our route. They provided us with a more youthful and personal viewpoint, and allowed us to see the town through the eyes of the citizens of Mart. (np)*

The mappers took photographs of the spaces that the students highlighted, and recorded their commentary. Similar to the students worked on the signage project, the TAM students decided to create a book of their wanderings because of the amount of data they collected. Each page of the book (created at

www.blurb.com) contains a photograph of a building, accompanied by narrative, which is notably not attributed to any one of the Mart students. Also included on each page is a Google Map that traces Mart's streets, showing the location of each stop on the journey. Cumulatively, the book paints a vivid picture of local history and culture, as the Mart students explain the stories behind abandoned houses and businesses, the history of a dump truck, a fire hydrant, and even some of Mart's fauna.

A particularly fascinating detail in this book is the discussion about the graffiti. These relatively anonymous "tags" would probably go unnoticed to the casual eye, but in the narration provided in this drift map, we learn that they were probably signed by members of a gang who identified themselves by wearing red. Though casually presented in the map, all of this was huge news the longstanding MCP researchers. We didn't know about any gang activity, nor had we previously thought of spaces in Mart as perhaps being "territory" in this sense. Is there serious gang activity in town? Does it relate to the significant drug culture that exists in Mart? Perhaps the gang culture is merely a harmless means of identification among a small number of kids?" Neither the map nor the students' final portfolios answer these questions, and the MCP researchers haven't heard about any gang activity since then. But in brilliant form, the map demonstrates *potential* relationships; it suggests ways that Mart youth may or may not identify with one another — past, present, or future — and how these identities may relate to particular spaces in town.

The association building between the TAM and Mart High school students extended beyond the field trips to Mart. At the end of the semester, the Mart High School students mappers came to Austin to look at the finished products and learn about UT. The work with UT students and the field trips that they generate are, according to the Mart High principal LouAnn Wolf, one of the more essential aspects of the UT/Mart ISD partnership. Until four years ago, Mart High School was deemed "academically unacceptable" by the Texas education department. Since Ms. Wolf took over the stewardship of the school, it has since risen to the state's ninety-eighth percentile. Ms. Wolf has told MCP researchers that the mapping collaborations with UT students and the trips to UT provide her students with a sense of the possibilities beyond high school. These drift maps, then, seem to have created ongoing and important relationships between the UT mappers and their Mart guides, and may well have laid down new roads (or perhaps, just added a few more lanes) between Mart High School and colleges and universities around Texas, the U.S., and the world.

I turn now to a short video that demonstrates how drift mapping techniques can be extended through time and space. This project involved a collaboration between a Speech and Communications class in Mart High School and MCP researcher

Anne McNamee, a masters student at UT in Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities. Over the course of the Fall 2011 semester, Anne worked with the Mart students toward building a performance of poems that they had each written in class. Anne planned for the students to perform abbreviated versions of these poems in front of the Mart residents and community organizers who were part of the NEA-sponsored "Your Town" event in November 2011. Two obstacles stood in her way, however. First, the students were attached to their poems and were reluctant to perform only part of them. They were proud of the work they had done and couldn't (or wouldn't) decide which parts of the text they wanted to recite. This reluctance to edit down created problems for Anne in terms of conceiving the full performance, as the poems would take too long to recite and flatten the intended impact (for the participants and for the audience). A second, more pressing problem also presented itself. A few members of the class were in the unfortunate position of being on academic probation and were not allowed to go on school trips, so they could not travel to the retreat where the conference was being held. To proceed with a live performance meant that some would be left out.

To overcome these obstacles, Anne re-envisioned her live performance project as a pre-recorded video that could be played at the "Your Town" workshop. In the weeks leading up to the NEA workshop, Anne helped her students to craft an exercise that challenged students to write a poem about their relationship to Mart by responding to the question, "Where are you from?" Predictably, the students took this prompt literally at first, responding with a short list of specific locations. Anne then encouraged the students to think more imaginatively about how space and identity relate, and followed up with the question,

Movie 4.2 "Our Mart"

Video: Words and Voices of Mart High School students, video postproduction by Anne McNamee

"Where else are you from?" Anne collected audio recordings of the students reciting their work, and asked the students to take pictures with their cellphones of meaningful spaces or objects that corresponded to the places in their poems.

Anne used Apple's iMovie software to splice together the students' poems and match them to the photographs and to music. To lend a sense of movement to the procession of static images, Anne used a simple technique built into iMovie that allows zooming into and scanning across static images. (Apple calls this "the Ken Burns effect" after the famous documentary maker). Often, the photographs match up with the line being said at the time. For example, at 2:18, one of the students says "I'm from the country," which maps onto an out-of-focus image of a field. But the rapid succession of lines ruptures the parallel between sound and image. The student continues: "I am from sleeping, I am from a home, I am from tractors, I am from girls, I am from trash, I am from grease, I am from work, I am from farming, I am from a dirt road" (2:19 - 2:28). This rapid procession of objects, practices, feelings, and textures careen across the rhythmic drift of the images, giving the impression that no particular space could hold all the "places" the narrator is "from."

In written or spoken discourse, *anaphora* refers to the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences, clauses, or verses. The anaphoric structure of the voiceover track of the "Our Mart" video piles up association after association through alternating and overlapping voices. The application of the poems to the students' photographs both anchors and unmoors the viewer's sense of what place means. Mart is a home for multifaceted lives, and as implied from the photographs presented in the video, these are lives that occur in familiar, mundane and (sometimes literally) out-of-focus spaces. However, the movie suggests, static images of space cannot contain the histories, desires, hopes, and beliefs that flow through it. Space, as rendered through the combination of poetry and images and music in this video, is singular and multiple, real and virtual, now and forever.

Clearly, "Our Mart" is a drift map of sorts. It reveals the grain of place by privileging subjective experience over grand (or even counter-) narratives. It presents spaces, or "plottings," that appear unremarkable, and creates relationships among them (and among those who gave voice to the video, as well as to the viewers). The combination of carefully edited voices, visual images, and music succeeds in imbuing these spaces with a sense of substance, even mystery, and in so doing changes attitudes toward those spaces. Anne interviewed the participants in the "Our Mart" video after it was screened at the high school, and many of the students remarked on how they think about their home town differently after making the video. One even remarked that "Mart might be a cool place to be after all."

Conclusion

Corner's overall theory of maps includes two types that I have not discussed in this chapter. One, is called a "game-board" map, a kind of mapping-as-performance where competing constituencies are invited to work out their differences on a shared surface that represents a contested territory. As Corner describes it, the map helps the disagreeing parties to negotiate and find common ground while playing out various scenarios. Even though we haven't experimented with it at the MCP yet, I'm intrigued by the game-board map. I have often thought about how we might employ this mapping strategy, perhaps by staging the exercise like a debate, where students are assigned opposite points of view to prepare and then explore together. Elements of Mart's wicked problem always seem to stem from the difficult legacies and fraught potentials of space — think of the football field, the community garden, the abandoned storefronts — and the game-board structure presents yet another method that could help to model dynamic and generative uses of space in town.

Rhizome, the structure famously theorized by critical theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, completes Corner's suite of mapping methods. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome "has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and overspills, [constituting] linear multiplicities" (qtd. in Corner, 244). A rhizome favors how things work and what they do over how things are represented and what they mean. A "rhizome" map, according to Corner, presents a "plane of consistency" — a surface that is inclusive yet structuring in that it invites new and open-ended relationships (Corner 244). Corner hasn't many illustrative examples to share, which considering the idea's intricacy, doesn't surprise me. The MCP's structure — and the document you are currently reading on your iPad that endeavors to explain it — are both attempts to respond to unspeakably complex problems with rhizomatic rigor. They strive toward a structure that has shape yet lacks boundaries, and they struggle with mooring representation to its seemingly porous bulk. Following Deleuze and Guattari, Corner argues that the difficult work of building a rhizomatic map follows the principle of the plane of consistency upon which "several different graphic and notational systems have to come into play so the diverse and 'unmappable' aspects of a *milieu* are revealed" (245). In its method and presentation, this dissertation

has merely begun the unending and wicked work of mapping that plane.

Endnotes

1. Some of the footage from this video features prominently in the rough documentary short about the Chambless Field mural from Chapter 1 (which Eric helped edit).

2. For a recent overview of how critical spatial theory has been mobilized in rhetoric and composition, see Scott Barnett's 2012 *Kairos* article, "Psychogeographies: Ma(r)king Space at the Limits of Representation."

3. The Austin Clubhouse is a nonprofit that supports Austin residents with debilitating psychological and psychiatric conditions. For more information, see: <http://austinclubhouse.org/>.

4. "Pecha Kucha" was developed by architects to address the problem of badly designed and lengthy PowerPoint presentations. For more information about the "Pecha Kucha" presentation style, see: <http://www.pecha-kucha.org/>.

Conclusion

If You Don’t Feel Stupid, You’re Probably Doing It Wrong

I conclude this dissertation with a story — one that touches on writing community, on participatory engagement, and on mapping — that lays bare a provocative but painful early moment in my MCP trajectory during the frenzied summer of 2010. In curious ways, it both haunts and structures this dissertation, and I rehearse it here because I have to, and because I genuinely believe it offers a rare and beneficial perspective, particularly for those civic engagement practitioners in the early stages of forming a wicked response.

When the MCP was awarded its first Dulaney grant in May 2010, we had little time to prepare for the summer projects that we had promised to deliver in the proposal. One of those events was a three-week digital media summer camp at Mart High School. I planned as best I could, but because of our late start, I had no idea about the age range or the number of students who might actually turn up. Over the course of the workshop, students came and went, but I was fortunate to have seven regular attendees, all African-American middle schoolers.

Among other activities, I designed a simple exercise in which the students would visit the “historically important sites” in town, shoot some footage, and produce a short video about these sites. Being new to Mart, I enlisted the help of Bill, a caucasian retired schoolteacher. Bill knowledgeably guided us around town, explaining the historical significance of all the landmarks we visited, but at the graveyard, the tour came to an abrupt halt. After Bill had finished talking, one of the students named Bryson asked, “Are we going to our graveyard next?” Neither Bill nor I even knew this other cemetery existed, but the expedition was fluid enough to allow this brief detour. We clambered back into the cars, and headed across the now-nonexistent train tracks into the neighborhood that is still known as “Black Town.”

Over the next week, the students and I used a simple online video editing tool called Animoto to make short, movie trailer-style video clips of Mart’s landmarks. Here is the video that a student named Jaylon produced, which is a representative sample of the kinds of videos that the group was creating.

<Insert: Jaylon video>

Movie 5.1 “Tour of Mart, TX, Historical Sites of Our Town”

Video: “Bryson”

On the last day of the summer camp, the students’ parents came to see what their kids had achieved. They were impressed with the maps, website pages, and the funny hip-hop track that we made, but a hush came over the room when we showed the videos. Afterwards, Paula told me that some of the parents complained that the videos were “not our history.” That sentiment pointed to what I interpreted as a failure: an egregious oversight and absence in the design of our tour, one that is now archived in each of those videos. Thanks to Bryson’s quick-thinking, we were fortunate to have had the opportunity to visit the African American cemetery, but none of the students chose to represent it in their videos; they were merely on assignment, valuing the spaces and representing the town’s history that Bill and I had predetermined for them.

After that presentation, I was left alone in the lab to log off the computers, tidy my stuff away into boxes, and leave the school for the last time that summer. I sat at the teacher’s console blankly staring into space, unable to take in everything that had just happened. On one level, the workshop was a success: parents seemed proud of their children’s achievements, and the kids themselves were happy with their certificates and the chance given to them to show off the digital tricks they had learned. The principals of the high school and middle school were similarly impressed with their students’ ability to build maps, videos, and website pages; they could see how media-building skills could and should be added into their curricula. That workshop, regardless of its flaws, sowed the seeds of what has become a strong relationship with the Mart Independent School District and an integral part of the MCP’s overall mission. But these successes aside, the project still seemed like an enormous failure. I felt ashamed, vulnerable, and incredibly stupid. I picked up my iPad to record my thoughts, and I managed to type in four words: “I totally fucked up.”

That diary entry, I’ll concede, is neither an illuminating piece of evidence nor a publication-friendly use of language. But it is

important for precisely those reasons. It represents how words failed me that day — and have failed me many, many times since — to make legible the impact that early experience in Mart has had on my understanding of ethics, technology, and civic engagement. Practical factors such as lack of preparation time, no prior knowledge of who the workshop participants would be, and technological constraints certainly influenced the outcome. Regardless, my methods relied too heavily on the potential of social media technologies at the expense of their implications, confirming the near-prophetic warning that Cynthia and Richard Selfe made in "The Politics of the Interface: Power and its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones": "[A]n overly optimistic vision of technology is not only reductive, and, thus, inaccurate, it is also dangerous in that it renders less visible the negative contributions of technology that may work potently and effectively against critically reflective efforts of good teachers and students" (482). In my rush and enthusiasm to teach the basics of media production, I had designed an exercise that effectively pushed to the side the ethical, pedagogical, and cultural implications of what I was doing. Rather than allowing students to map their own narratives and their own form of representation, I assigned them an exercise that could never be successful as designed or demonstrate more than basic technological competence. On the day of the tour, the students taught me far more than I taught them. Through their gentle but firm refusal to commit to video the African-American graveyard, they mapped for me the mistake I made of presuming a stable, shared representation of history.

I share this video and story here partially as a sort of penance, and also as a permanent, published reminder to myself of my "feeling stupid." But they're also indexes of a learning moment, an instance of things going right by going wrong. I learned something, the kids learned something, the parents learned something. In addition to the "not our history" complaint, Paula told me that Janet Bridgewater, a member of the African American community (and also a member of the MCP) agreed with the parents' critique of our videos, but that she shared with others that night the idea that if the African American community wanted to have their history represented, then they needed "to step up" and make sure that it became part of the conversation.

This written interpretation of that media exercise and the workshop's complex aftermath are the result of many drafts over the last two years. Since the media camp, I have sought counsel from a wide range of scholarship that speaks to the challenges inherent in designing and implementing technology in civic engagement work. Despite the wisdom of that scholarship, the absences in my students' videos continues to exert a force on me, though not one that will yield to being entirely comprehensible. I have felt stupid writing drafts of this conclusion, and I even feel stupid referring to the event now.

What has changed gradually in the interim is my relation to stupidity itself. Cultural theorist Avital Ronell argues in Stupidity (2002) that to perceive stupidity purely as error is to rely on a rational understanding of knowledge that dismisses that which cannot be represented in language (20). Stupidity isn't the opposite of knowledge, she suggests — stupidity is condition for knowledge's possibility (21). As she so beautifully writes, "[s]tupidity makes stronger claims for knowing and the presencing of knowledge than rigorous intelligence would ever permit itself to make" (43). Through my work with the MCP and my work on this dissertation, I have come to learn firsthand that you shouldn't (and probably can't) write stupidity away, as it yields vital understanding about knowledge, history, relationality, civic engagement, and even the self.[1] It's something that should stick with you, because engagement in its myriad forms involves risk, failure, and vulnerability. But "feeling stupid" should't drive us away from the work at hand; it should encourage us to more fully commit to civic engagement's wicked problems — to be better at what we do, and to produce a more careful, more creative style of wicked response.

Feeling stupid should expose you to others (though we often try to hide it away), for it's in the confronting of one's own (and one another's) stupidity that substantive and productive relationships can be formed. Students in the MCP-affiliated classes have come to discover that though writing for and about are important skills, it is the writing with that truly has the power to reinvent relationships and (bit by bit) the world around us. We need to respond to a problem, and then solicit responses to our responses, and then respond again. And certainly, we need "to step up," as Janet Bridgewater says so astutely. My attempts to respond to the challenges that wickedness poses in this dissertation have been rewarding, but infinitely challenging. To wrestle wickedness to the page, and later, the screen, signals the promise and difficulty of relational reinvention. This dissertation's iBook format (with all of its potential for new relationalities) is a small part of precisely this reinvention. However, it's the response to the response, no matter how stupid it makes you feel, that really matters. I sincerely can't wait for those responses to my dissertation — from my committee, my colleagues in the MCP, my students, and from Janet and Logan and Principal Wolf and Jeannie and Jaylon … and from all those with wickedness on their minds.

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